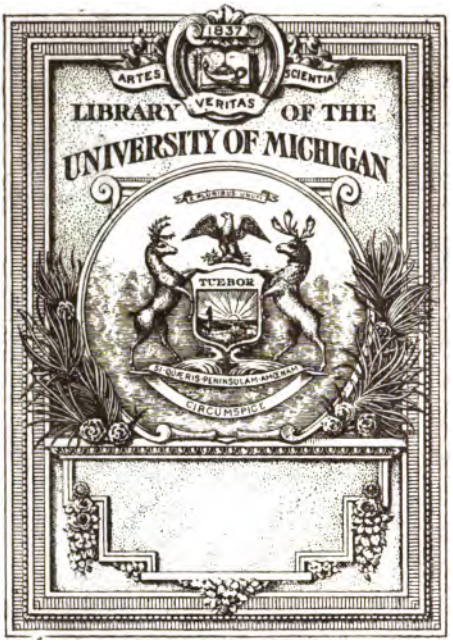
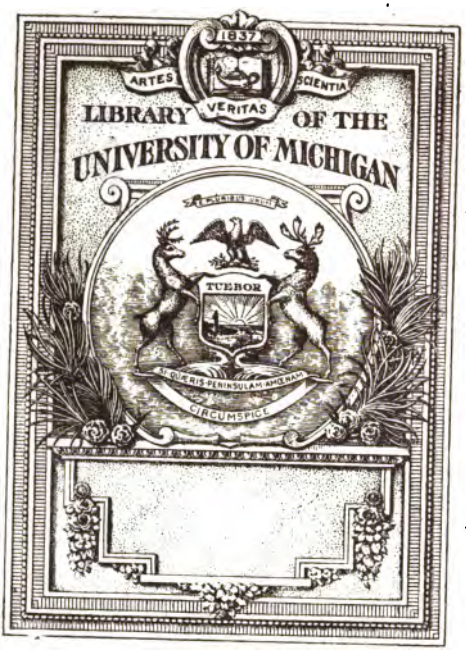
CLOISTER WENDHUSEN





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Cloister Wendhusen

By

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Wendhusen.

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CHAPTER I.

"Now, adieu, Magdalena," said my guardian, and kissed me somewhat shyly on my forehead, while moisture glistened in the little, kind eyes. "Adieu, little one, and do not worry about George; I will watch over him. He shall visit me regularly every Sunday, and I will see that on that day he writes you a few lines; and—your mother's grave we will keep in good order—Christiana and I—my child. George goes there often; isn't that so, my boy? So, I think, that is all, my little one—yet, no; you will not take it unkind that I do not go to the station with you? I have an engagement at 9 o'clock. Christiana can do everything for you, attend to the ticket and luggage, and remember, you change cars at Wolldorf. Do not be afraid of asking questions; it is better to question too much than too little. Someone will meet you at Jenastedt; possibly your aunt, or your Cousin Fernande. Accustom yourself, as soon as may be, to your new and strange surroundings at Wendhusen, and write soon, very soon, to me!" Yet again he took my hand, and with the other stroked my cheek. "No weeping, little one, no weeping!" he said, and went hastily out of the room.

"Adieu, Uncle!" I had said, softly, and in spite of his command not to weep, the hot tears filled my eyes.

Across the room, against the window, leaned a slender lad of eight years; his arms crossed, and a dark, defiant look on his pretty face, that was framed with an abundance of dark curls.

"You will, truly, George," I entreated, "write to me very often, won't you?"

He nodded, and turned around.

"And on mamma's birthday I will send you a wreath, and you will carry it to her grave, dear; I—I can not do it any more." The tears almost made the last inaudible.

"Yes," came short and forced from the lips of the boy.

"And once in awhile send me a few flowers from her grave; it will almost seem then as if she sent a greeting to me, George—"

"O Lena! Lena!" he cried, passionately, throwing his arms around my neck, sobbing, and clinging to me in impetuous tenderness. "Do not go away. Can you not stay here? Why do you go to our aunt that you know mamma did not like?"

"I must go, dear heart, I must!" I whispered, pressing my mouth on his curly head. "How can I stay here? Uncle says I ought to be very thankful that aunt will take me; otherwise I should have to go to strangers—"

"But Christiana says the aunt is so proud," he interrupted; "suppose she should be hateful to you, Lena?" He bent back, and looked at me with his great, dark eyes, full of intense anxiety.

"Why should she be, dear?" I answered, seemingly calm, although I was far from feeling so in my heart.

"Because, Lena, she wouldn't have anything to do with mamma," he declared; "and when the letter came from aunt, when she wrote to uncle you might come to her, I heard Christiana say to herself: 'I knew it! She does not take the poor thing out of love, but so it shall not be

said a Fräulein von Demphoff had to take a situation.' Don't you see, Lena?"

I was silent, and held my little brother close in my arms. Thou dear God, the words he spoke cut into my soul. The sister-in-law of my mother—she bore the same name as I, and yet she had never acknowledged mamma; she had not only been unfriendly, but had never noticed her poor relations— Ah, yes, it was probable she had taken the niece purely from this motive.

And I was to go to her to-day! It was already fifteen minutes of 9 o'clock, and the train left about half-past. I looked with sad eyes on my boy, who still clasped me with his arms, the dear little lad! How could I leave him, the only being who belonged to me in the world since our mother died, after a year's illness, and who had loved us O, so dearly! I sank down on the floor and leaned my head against his. "Ah, mamma, mamma, why did you go and leave us?" broke from my lips, in my fear. If she had lived, I should not have to go away, and George would not have to grow up among strangers! Suppose he should be ill; he was so apt to have the quinsy in the winter; and when he coughed, who would be by his bed to hand him hot milk, and pet him and comfort him? No one. A nameless anxiety seized me. I could not go, I said decidedly to myself; I could not leave him even if I had to live in the poorest attic, and sew for our living.

"Christiana, I can not go, I will not go!" I cried to the old woman who just then entered the room and brought me a cup of bouillon. "I beg you, let me stay here with you! I do not care what I do, only so I can be with George!"

"I have thought it all over," she nodded, and the white cap nodded, too. "That is just like the blessed Frau

Mother, who on that account never went out of the house; but this time, there is no help for it; you must go, Fräulein Lena; you can not stay here. Now don't you fret about the boy; he is with good people in the pension. The Frau Doctor, you will see, will take good care of him, and I will look after him, you know that; but I am vexed with him," she said, in quite another tone, "that he should make it so hard for you. What, with his howling and fussing, one would take him for a cry-baby—shame on you, George!" She set the cup on the table, and with her hands on her hips, apparently very angry, she looked at the boy, who, at the last words, tore himself loose from me, and throwing back his head, hastily wiped the tears out of his eyes. "I am not crying," he said, bravely.

"No, to be sure not; boys must have courage. My Mann, who was a boy with your blessed father, always said there never was a sharper, smarter gentleman in all the world, and it would be strange if his son were different. Now, come, Lenachen," she said, kindly, to me, "drink your broth, for we must go; it is high time; and you, George, you must go back to your class; the hour you were allowed is quite past. Now, say adieu, and be quick about it."

"Adieu, sister Lena," whispered he in my ear, and again strained his arms around my neck. "I will write soon, and send you flowers; and Lena, when your next birthday comes, will you not be seventeen years old?"

"Yes, dear; farewell, farewell, my dear, good George," I whispered; "do not get ill, and be very careful when you go bathing, and in the gymnasium. You know mamma was always so anxious. Go often to see uncle, and be industrious in school; send me your reports,

won't you? and if Aunt will permit, perhaps you can come in the autumn vacation ——."

"Adieu, Lena, dear Lena! I will do all you say, only do not cry; *I* am not going to, truly not."

He rushed out of the room without turning his face. I ran to the window and looked after the delicate, slender boy; he was just thrusting his handkerchief into his pocket, then he threw back his head proudly and went on without looking around. What had I not given, had he only turned just once his pretty face to me. With a full heart I left the window.

"Now forward; hurry!" admonished Christiana, while she threw a hasty glance at the clock that hung over my guardian's writing-desk. "It is quite a distance to the station and the droschke will be here directly, and, Fräulein Lena, I have something to say to you. Your Frau Aunt I have known for many years, from the time I began to serve your parents; when they were first married, I went with them to Wendhusen. It is very fine there, Fräulein. You will wonder at the castle, the rooms and halls, and the park; you have never seen anything like it. Yes, what I wished to say, your Frau Aunt, the Frau von Demphoff, is a remarkable woman. Cold as ice. Do not think that she will come toward you, as your blessed mother would do when you came back from a walk, so glad to see you that she must take you to her heart and kiss you; first, she isn't your mother, and second, she has no kisses for her own children. At that time they were little things, the eldest perhaps eleven years, and the little girls seven and five years; I never saw the mother, however, caress them. Ah, how very different was your mother, Fräulein, who scarcely left the nursery for anxiety and watchfulness. How pretty she used to look sitting by your cradle, almost a child herself, just as dainty, and

little, and slender as you are, with just such dark curls and eyes.

"But drink your beef tea, Fräulein, drink; I only wanted to tell you this, so you would not wonder if there were no delight and rejoicing on your arrival, and no one particularly - well, I am talking too much; you will find it out yourself, child, and your head isn't going to be bitten off, and one can get accustomed to everything, and anyway, it is better than to go among strangers, and be a governess."

"And, Fräulein Lena, you will not take it amiss that I have said so much," she began, after a pause, and the friendly, earnest face flushed dark-red under the snow-white cap. "You see, Fräulein, I have lived through good and bad days with your Frau Mother, and, poor soul, there were more bad than good; but the dear God sent them, and He knows what is best. I was married from her house, and when your Herr Father died, and your Frau Mother could no longer keep a maid, I was her waiting-woman till now, and I have always meant well, and have done what I could; the blessed mistress knew that. My goodness!" she interrupted herself. "Hurry, Fräulein! put on your hat and veil; the droschke is at the door. There is plenty of time, only hurry. Here is your lunch, some buttered bread, and wine and water. You have no need to say good-bye to anyone else? No; your guardian has gone to market; then, I will lock the door. Have you your pocket-book? Dear sakes, what an untidy house a widower has, to be sure! Don't fall down the stairs, Fräulein, it is so dark there; now, get into the carriage. Coachman, drive fast to the central station."

I sat, as in a dream, while we spun through the familiar streets. The usual throngs were hurrying to and fro.

There was the large dry-goods house for which my poor busy mother had sewed so many stitches; there the church, where at Easter I was confirmed; and now we were in the street where we used to live. I bent my head out of the carriage and caught a flying glance. How dreary the three empty windows in the third story looked down at me. Ah, how often from there a loving, gentle face had smiled and nodded to me as I came home from school! For weeks the dreadful black coffin had hid from me those dear features, and the earth now pressed heavily upon it. And farther we went; and the droschke jolted over the uneven road, and Christiana held my hand and talked to me—what, I do not know.

And then the rush at the station; the luggage was checked, the ticket bought, and then the bell rang for the passengers to take the coupés.

"Conductor, conductor, lady's coupé," called Christiana. "See, it is quite empty, child. Now don't lose your ticket; and, Fräulein Lena, remember I will look after and care for George like the apple of my eye. Now, hold your head up like the best; don't go headlong into things, and take what comes with composure—but you have a wise little head, like your Frau Mother. God protect you, Lenachen; come again soon to us, and don't forget me and my old man. I shall think often of you. May it go well with you. Nay, nay, be brave; now don't weep like that," and she held my hand as in a vise, while great tears rolled down her cheeks, and her lips trembled and worked in suppressed emotion. Another hand pressure, a last adieu, a last message to George; then a shrill whistle sounded, and, puffing and snorting, the long train set itself in motion. I leaned out of the window for a last look at the tall figure that stood motionless on the platform and held the hand over the

eyes, the better to watch the slowly-moving train; then I could see her no more, and I leaned back in the seat with a sick feeling of desolation and loss. It seemed to me I was a feather, being whirled around in the pitiless wind, without protection, without support, alone, alone without a home, without a father's house.

It was the first journey I had ever taken; until now I had never been out of the large town where I was born and had grown up.

I raised my eyes to the region we were flying through. The steeples of the town were almost lost in the sea of vapor that spread around us; then the train thundered over the great iron bridge; then it cut through green meadows, and here and there a white sail showed in the far distance, and finally all became unfamiliar and strange.

Then came again the sick, frightened feeling, the inexpressible longing for my little brother. I buried my face in the bolster of the coach, and gave myself up to the luxury of a good cry.

Then I felt comforted, and also too exhausted to feel keenly any more, and I resigned myself to the present moment and fell into deep thought. My childhood rose before me. I had scarcely left it, and yet in the last few weeks I had grown so old in my feelings. I went far back to the beautiful time when papa was living, and how I would run to the door to meet him, shouting to be tossed up in the air.

We were not living then in the close, narrow attic-rooms. I saw elegant, comfortable surroundings, and my dainty, high-bred little mother in costly robes. My mother—she came before me like a picture out of that time—a charming picture. I could not identify this fairy-like creature with the suffering, broken woman of the later days, with the large, hollow eyes that looked

out into life with such unspeakable sorrow and grief in their depths.

Later came a veil over my remembrance. It was to me as if a something was in our home that was paralyzing—that lay like a pall over its inmates. I remember that mamma often wept, and that my father would speak loud and sharp to her, and then for days would not come back to the house.

Only Christiana remained clear to my recollection. I thought she must look to-day just as she looked at that time, when she would stick bonbons in my mouth, or pick me up, almost violently, and carry me down-stairs to the kitchen when the talk was so loud and harsh in my mother's room. And then came one morning—a morning I shall remember with bliss as long as I live. Christiana took me, drunk with sleep, out of my little bed, and carried me into my mother's bed-room, and my wondering eyes fell on a cradle beside her bed, and therein lay asleep my sweet little baby brother. I scarcely know how the time passed after that. I would sit for hours beside his cradle, with my little, earnest face turned to the wee sleeper. I was too intent on my watch to remember to eat or drink. Once my father came into the quiet nursery. He stood by the cradle and looked down on the little one, and as I tried to embrace him lovingly, he almost roughly pushed me back.

He was a large, proud-looking man, with blonde hair and beard. I remember him so distinctly at this moment, as he slowly turned to my mother, who had just entered and come to the cradle. Then there was a conversation between them, at first in a quiet tone; then suddenly I was filled with fear, for my father caught the slender figure of mother, and pressed her passionately to him and cried out:

"Elsie, my poor Elsie, would you had never seen me! I am guilty of your unhappiness, and of the children—"

She laid, warningly, her hand on his lips, and pointed to me, and in the same moment that Christiana came and carried me out of the room, I heard the low sobs of my mother.

Then came the christening, and for the last time our house displayed its elegance and luxury. There were many guests, and I went around the circle, giving my little hand, like a polite, well-trained child.

On that day I saw my mother for the last time in a colored dress; it was a deep-red silk. She pleased me in it, and her dark, curly head looked very lovely from under the wreath of red fuchsias.

Soon after that we moved into a smaller dwelling, which grieved me very much. It was a very quiet street in which we now lived, and there were many steps to climb. Then my father went on a journey. In the hour of parting, my mother embraced him, weeping bitterly, and he kissed me and my little brother again and again. Christiana finally came to say it was time for him to go, and as he left the room he said again the words that he so often said those days: "I hope to come back soon, and take you away with me."

And every night my mother would fold my hands and tell me to pray for the dear father who had gone far, far over the sea—so very far.

How many hundred times have I said that prayer, and tried to see the rocking ship that Christiana described to me. I would shut my eyes and make a picture of a water surface, where one only saw water and sky, so Christiana said, but a little piece of land would shove itself in.

We lived very quietly. Christiana no longer lived

constantly with us. She had married papa's servant, and only came to us certain hours every day.

George learned to run about, and one day my mother said papa had written that early in the New Year he would come to bring us, and then we would go on the big ship over the wide sea.

But it was all very different. Father died of one of those terrible diseases that often attack a foreigner in that climate. I did not know then what it meant to lose him. I only felt my mother was in great trouble when I saw her, half mad with pain and grief, pace up and down the narrow room, and heard her despairing moans; but I learned to realize the truth, for want came to us—the bitterest want.

My mother gave herself up to the most sombre grief. She worked now for money, and taught my childish hands also to work. White and still she sat at the window, and the only movement was the delicate little hands that unceasingly drew the thread through the fine cambric.

Only sometimes when George would come and fondle her, and she looked into the loving eyes, then she would break out into tears, and throw her work away and clasp him in her arms. "My child, my poor children," she would cry, and it would be hours before she could compose herself.

As time went on she grew resigned. A wonderful will dwelt in that delicate body. If I awoke in the night, I would see her at the table sewing, and when the day dawned she was again at her work.

Then I was sent to school, and it was at this time that I first knew I had an aunt. My guardian had urged my mother to apply to the wife of my dead uncle for assistance. I well remember when the answer came, how

deathly white my mother looked when she sank back in her chair after reading the letter. "They hold me guilty!" she said, half aloud; "guilty of his misfortune!"

And "I am guilty!" she repeated over and over, till Christiana appeared.

"Christiana, I am guilty of our misfortune," said she, with a pitiful moan. "I am the cause of my husband's death."

Christiana took the letter, and, after reading it, threw it into the stove. She trembled with anger, but only said: "Don't you weep, Madam; it isn't worth your tears."

Dear mamma was taken ill that day, very ill; and when she recovered she was the still, broken-spirited woman she remained to the end. She talked with us; she laughed also; but it was quite different from the old days.

So I grew up under this pressure of work, deprived of all amusements, and yet joyful as a child in the happiest circumstances. I thought it so beautiful, in our mansard dwelling with the ivy running around the walls. It was so lovely when Christiana would take us walking on Sunday, and would buy us buns with her money. And O, the afternoon hour! As I sat at the window busy with my sewing, and the clock in St. John's tower across the way struck 4, how quickly I would lean out of the window and watch for the sight of the dear little figure that would come bounding up the street, on the full run, around the corner, and up the steps, our darling, our hearts' delight!

The school-boy flew to the nearest chair, the lunch-box landed on the table, and our sweet little mother looked with kindling eyes to see how he bit into the bread with his strong young teeth, the bread that sister Lena had spread very thinly.

The long winter evenings were beautiful in our little room, and dear were the summer afternoons, when we went walking or sat with our sewing in the shady park.

And doubly dear all this seemed to me, now I was to lose it and go among strangers! Like a hateful dream came up to me the black coffin; the strange people that took it away; Christiana weeping; and afterward the uncomfortable life at my guardian's, with his untidy housekeeper.

How fast events had rushed on! how the time had flown! I awakened first to a realizing sense of what had befallen me, when they said I must be separated from George, and that my aunt had had the goodness to take me into her home. This was a trial more overwhelming than the death of my mother, for she had looked so peaceful in death—there was such a blessed smile around the sweet lips.

"It is well with her," Christiana had said. "It is well with her."

We had taken no farewell of her. One night she fell into a sweet slumber, and from the earthly sleep she passed into the other; yes—it was well with her, but we—my little brother——

The hot tears rushed into my eyes, but I pressed my lips together and looked out into the smiling landscape we were passing through. Yellow waved the corn fields in the wind, here and there lay a town in the shadow of old oaks, and over all the cloudless blue heavens. Was there sorrow and pain in the world?

CHAPTER II.

Finally the locomotive whistled for the last time, and the train rolled into the terminus.

"Jenastedt," cried the conductor, as he threw open the door of the coupé.

With throbbing heart I bent out and peered around. Some ladies were standing on the platform, but they hastened eagerly to another coupé. Several gentlemen were talking in groups; one of them raised his lorgnette to his eye and stared at me boldly, but no one came to find me, and timidly I descended, filled with anxiety.

"Baggage to be taken to the town, Fräulein?" asked a baggage-man.

"No, I think——" I replied, all the time looking right and left; "I wish to go to Wendhusen, and——"

"There is a carriage there, from Wendhusen, Fräulein, the cloister coach, and old Gottlieb. You are a stranger? Well, go around there, around the house, and give me your luggage checks and I will take your things to the carriage."

I followed the direction and stepped around the building; a hotel carriage was just driving away.

In another very handsome equipage sat some ladies, the same I had seen on the platform. There was only one other conveyance there, a remarkably uninviting-looking coach, with half the top thrown back, and which appeared to stand very shaky on its wheels. On the

high seat sat an old man, as straight as a candle, holding the reins with all the dignity possible belonging to his calling; his brown livery coat was much the worse for wear, and the horses were in striking contrast to their driver's erect bearing, for their tired heads hung nearly to the ground.

I drew near to the shabby old coach.

"Is this a carriage from Wendhusen?" I asked the coachman.

"Yes, Fräulein," he replied, taking off his cap, and hurriedly scrambling down from the box.

"Pardon, Fräulein; I thought Anna was at the platform to meet you. God knows where she is," he continued angrily to himself as he opened the carriage door.

"Please get in, Fräulein; she must be back directly. She went to do an errand in the town for Frau von Riedingen; we have waited long enough already for her."

I got in, leaned back, and waited. It was hot, and on this side of the building the sun lay in its full power. My luggage had long since been fastened on the carriage; the coachman sat on his box again, with an impatient scowl on his face; the horses now and then switched off a fly; the highway which stretched away in the distance to the town showed no one who appeared to belong to us.

A quarter of an hour passed, then another; the old man murmured an oath, and evidently would enjoy going on and leaving the "Anna" behind.

I shut my eyes for very weariness, and from the many tears I had shed, my head ached fearfully. Finally I heard a voice, and there behind the carriage stood a stout little person, almost smaller than I, in a light summer dress, with innumerable ruffles, and under the large straw hat,

much-trimmed with field flowers and blue ribbon, I saw a very round face, flushed to a dark red, with small eyes that were at this moment directed on a little boy who held a large box, almost as large as himself; the cover had slipped to one side and a white mull texture was shoved into view.

"For heaven's sake!" she cried out. "You will let the whole dress fall out, you awkward clown." She took the box from him and placed it on the back seat, so that I was obliged to straighten myself up from my comfortable position, and sit as bolt upright as old Gottlieb, in order not to bring my black, dust-covered dress in contact with the airy, immaculate contents box. Then the little person sat herself opposite me with a short "Good day," drawing on her lisle-thread gloves. "Now, hurry, Gottlieb, it is high time; it must be nearly half-past 4 o'clock, and my mistress makes her toilet at 6, and heaven protect me if we do not get there."

"You should have thought of that before," growled the old man; "they are both too old," pointing with his whip to the horses. "Why haven't you been punctual? The Fräulein must have nearly burned up in the heat."

"Was it my fault that the dressmaker didn't have the dress ready?" she asked, pertly, without being in the least embarrassed before me. "Of course I had to wait for the dress; that was *my* duty, and you must get me to the house at the right time. That is *your* duty."

"That's all well enough to say," nodded the old man, taking his erect position; "but I can't do any more than I can. Your mistress should have sent Friedrich with the chestnut horse; then she could have had her furbelows at the right time. What will be, will be. Get up!" he cried out, clicking with his tongue, and with slow steps the horses set themselves in motion.

Oh, how lovely it was to ride in a carriage! I forgot all fear as we now reached the height of the road that led up over a wooded hill. Then, below wound a little rushing stream through a waving green meadow; and opposite, again, arose a wooded mountain-ridge, and behind this, blue mountains raised themselves, and there were valleys, and mountains, and woods as far as the eye could see, in wonderful, luxurious freshness. The small eyes under the straw hat looked much amused at my enthusiasm, as I said aloud: "How glorious!" But old Gottlieb turned himself around and his face beamed.

"Yes, truly, Fräulein, it is beautiful with us; and see there behind the high mountain lays Wendhusen; it is truly a bit of Paradise that we have here."

"Ah, yes, indeed it is beautiful," I assented, as I looked up into the tops of the old oaks and beeches, for we were now driving through the woods.

"This isn't anything, gracious Fräulein; wait until you get into our own forest. You have never seen such trees, such giants. These are nothing," he said, disparagingly, pointing to the trees around. "Yes, our master had his greatest pleasure in the woods, and the entire province can not show such a forest." And the horses slowly trotted along through the smiling region.

"That is Flissen," he turned back again to say after a while, as a stately castle became visible through the green tree-tops; "that belongs to the Baron Stelten. Pr-r-r," called he, suddenly, at the same time pulling his horses back hastily, and in the same moment flew close in front of us, out of an avenue, a light carriage, and turned into the main road. It was drawn by a handsome pair of bay horses, and two ladies sat on the coachman's seat.

For an instant I saw a young face under a white veil glance at me with indifference. Of the lady by her side, who was driving, I only caught a glimpse of abundant yellow hair coiled low on the neck, and a small hat on the proudly-carried head. On the back seat sat a servant in livery with crossed arms. Quick as an arrow, they were by us and away, leaving a cloud of dust behind them.

"Heavens! my mistress! If they go to the house and find the dress not there——. Gottlieb, do drive faster," cried my neighbor, impatiently.

"Really," I interrupted, surprised, "was that my cousin, Frau von Riedingen?"

"Frau von Riedingen, surely," she replied, with a half-compassionate glance. "She has Fräulein Stelten with her; she is going to take her to the reunion at D—. The Fräulein has lost her parents, and the gracious Frau is very fond of her, and hopes she will be——"

She cleared her throat and was silent.

I was silent also.

My pleasure in my drive was gone. The old, sick, anxious feeling came back, as I saw the elegant appearance of my cousin, and another feeling—that of shame and mortification. No one had gone to meet me. I was being brought in the old cloister coach, and seated beside my cousin's maid! But had not Christiana prophesied that? Had she not said no one would be glad to see me?

I felt my face was scarlet. Proudly I sat erect upon the seat and whispered to myself: "Be calm, and hold your head up."

"If mamma knew this——. How glad I am she does not know."

"There begins our forest, Fräulein," said Gottlieb, pointing with his whip to the wealth of wood foliage in

front of us, "and see, over there, the cupola among the trees? That is the mausoleum. Our master has lain therein fourteen years." He turned around to me with a simple-hearted, compassionate, little nod of his head. "Yes, yes; if he were alive——"

"You will be doing a great deal better if you drive faster, than giving the Fräulein information about the country," broke in my neighbor, with a sharp voice. "If I get home too late with the things, I shall say that your dawdling was the cause."

The old man flushed dark red.

"Look here, Miss Anna," said he, with emphasis, and turned entirely around to her, "you are talking to me, to the old coachman, Gottlieb, who gave satisfaction for twenty long years to his blessed master. I allow no human creature to give me any commands when on my coachman's seat; and if I have the worst carriage that stands in the coach-house, and the oldest horses there are to draw it, I am the same that I always was, and I am not under your orders. You know what I mean. I was sent to fetch the young lady here. You took the opportunity to go with me, and to come back with me to the house again—and that's all there is to it!"

"I will tell my mistress what you have said," retorted the waiting-maid, angrily.

The old man did not answer.

"And my mistress will tell the master how you obey her commands."

"That is the best thing you can do," he murmured.

"I beg you to drive a little faster, Gottlieb," said I now, for every moment in the coach with my pert neighbor seemed an eternity.

"Very well, gracious Fräulein," he replied, and urged on the horses.

We were already in the park, and the cool breeze in the shady woods blew refreshingly on my burning eyes. My heart was beating painfully, however, from anger and sorrow. How uncomfortable, how humiliating it was to me to feel——

My glance flew along the road ahead of us; any moment would the cloister come in sight in which I must now live. If I had been going to a real cloister I could not have felt more fear than at that moment.

A plow-boy was coming toward us. As he came near I could understand the words:

Es thut die Fremde dem Herzen nicht wohl,
Ich wüsst' schon wohin ich wandern soll.
Herr Fater, Frau Mutter, du Städtchen im Thal,
Ich grüss Euch, ich grüss viel tausand Mal.

Mein Mädchen, du brauchst zu grämen Dich nicht,
Dem Fremdling bringst Niemand ein freundlich Gesicht—
Fremd ist er und wird's in der Fremde stets sein;
O Heimath, O Heimath, du Sehnsucht mein!

He pulled off his cap to me as we passed him. He was so young—could he really know what homesickness meant? I looked after him as long as he was in sight, until Gottlieb's voice made me turn my head back again.

"There is the cloister," said he, pointing to high-pointed gable roofs that rose above the tops of the trees, "and below you can see the villa."

The villa?—a throng of questions rose to my lips. I knew so little of the persons with whom I was to live; Christiana had told me so little of them. Only through mamma's short intimations had I learned that an aunt existed, and that she had two sons and two daughters, one of whom was already married. In whom could I confide? To whom could I turn?

"There will be no rejoicing, child, when you arrive."

Those words of Christiana's rang in my ears again and again.

Outwardly calm, I saw, as we drew near, the white walls which gleamed out from the foliage of the trees; another bend, and there it lay before me like a wonder out of fairy-land—that small, charming, almost miniature castle. The evening sun bathed it in rosy light, and made the marble statues on balcony and steps seem almost warm with life. A velvety, green lawn spread itself before the place, and was dotted here and there with beds of flowers that shone out like brilliant jewels, and these surrounded a sandstone basin, out of which spouted a crystal, clear stream, whose splashing alone broke the deep stillness.

Charmed, I gazed at the beautiful building that stood there so airy and light, with its many balconies and its columned vestibule. Lovely climbing roses ran luxuriously around the delicate balustrade of the veranda, and hundreds of the pale-pink blooms sent their fragrance toward me.

It was like this that Christiana had described to me the castles in the fairy-stories that amused my childhood. If George could only see it—— George! that one word brought me back to stern reality.

The carriage stopped, my neighbor sprang nimbly out and vanished, with her box, behind the high, glass door. The old man glanced, listening, after her.

"Remain where you are, Fräulein," said he, "somebody will come directly."

I waited a moment; everything was quiet, no one came. Resolute, I got out.

"I will care for the luggage," called the old man after me. Then I heard the carriage roll away.

I stood now alone in the strange house, and dared not go forward. No sound came to my ear. I felt like turning

and running after old Gottlieb and entreating him: "Drive me away again, as far as your tired horses can go—only away from this house, where no one welcomes me, where there is no loving word for the fatherless and motherless girl."

So I stood, motionless, in the middle of the steps. My heart beat, until it seemed as if I could hear it. In my timidity I dared not go farther; the tears flooded my eyes.

Hark! was that not a step, the rustle of a dress? I held my breath; yes, I could see a white garment through the delicate carving of the baluster, and a slender girl's figure flew up the stairs that led to the upper floor; a head of golden hair shone a moment down to me, then it vanished; I heard a door open and shut, then all was still.

Involuntarily I followed her; it was surely my cousin; perhaps the maid had not—— A step sounded—a servant carrying a salver, with seltzer water and sugar, appeared.

"Please inform Frau von Demphoff her niece has come, and wishes to speak with her," said I to him.

"Very well," he replied, as he stepped down the hall, after throwing me a surprised glance, and opened a door. "Be kind enough to enter; I will go directly to My Lady."

Therewith he vanished behind a thick, violet-blue curtain into the room.

"My Lady begs you to enter," he said, holding back the *portières* much too high for my little person, and I walked in. On the opposite side of the room, at a writing-desk, sat a woman with her back to me, busily writing.

"In a moment," said a sharp voice, as if apologizing. "I am almost done; sit down—sit down, meanwhile."

I had plenty of time to examine the elegant appointments of the room, *portières*, furniture, hangings, carpet—all were of a violet-blue color. Over the writing-table hung a large picture, in an oval frame, of a young man—a handsome face, with dark eyes and somewhat haughty, full lips, that were ornamented by a bold mustache. He wore a cuirassier uniform. The white coat was very becoming to his fresh complexion.

Over an arm-chair, that stood beside a group of exotic plants—hung the companion to that picture. It was a rare piece of art work, the marvelously-painted cream-white satin of the dress, the fine lace, and the wealth of golden hair; the beautifully-formed shoulders rose out of the creamy stuff, and the neck carried an ideally-formed head, that was turned in half-profile to the beholder; a fine, straight nose and large, dark eyes, and around the rosy mouth a child-like, innocent smile—all made a very lovely picture.

The writer made a movement. She pushed back her chair and rose. I went toward her instinctively some steps before I dared to raise my eyes; and when I did, I saw a pair of cold, gray eyes, that looked at me with a strange, indifferent glance. By nature I do not weep easily, and to be pitied by anyone was always very annoying to me, painfully so; but the last few weeks it seemed, as Christiana expressed it, as if I were made of water, and now the great drops hung heavy upon my eyelids, but in a trice I had wiped them away; no new ones dared to come. I would not cry before those cold eyes, not for the world. They looked as if they would not know what tears meant, would not know that they were fountains which gushed forth out of deepest pain.

No, I could not show her how unhappy I was, how I mourned for my mother, what a longing I had for

George, and my sickening feeling of abandonment. I bit my lips, and raised my eyes gloomily to her.

"When did you come?" she asked, pointing to a chair and sitting down herself. She sat very erect with her hands lightly folded in her lap.

"More than half an hour ago," I replied.

"Why did you not come to me directly?"

"Because no one paid any attention to me, and I did not know where to go," was on my tongue's end, but I kept it back with commendable restraint, and before I could frame my answer a door hastily opened, the blue curtain was flung aside, and a young woman came in the room. I recognized at the first glance the original of the picture over the arm-chair, only at this moment the beautiful neck was covered with a lace-trimmed combing-cloth, and a richly embroidered white robe trailed behind her.

"Mammachen!" said a soft, languid, caressing voice—and on the pretty pink-and-white face was an unmistakable pout—"I am sorry to complain to you, but Gottlieb has been very rude to Anna and she desires satisfaction. Will you not say to Gerhardt that he must rectify it?"

By this time she was across the room, and stood in front of her mother with her back turned to me. In the puffs of her blonde hair glistened, here and there, a brilliant, and two dark roses were carelessly placed on the *coiffure*.

"I am sure, dear mamma, you do not approve of this rude fellow's insolence. Unfortunately, Gerhardt can never be persuaded to say an angry word to the old sneak. Even Melanie Stelten is indignant. You have no idea how impudent he was. Moreover, that child should be here. Have you——" The next moment the beautiful face had turned to me.

"Ah," she said, slowly, and the large almond-shaped eyes looked at me with a cool, critical stare. "She hasn't a feature of the Demphoffs; doesn't she look as if she came straight from the gypsies, mamma?" she asked, reaching her hand to me, but scarcely touching mine. "Evidently, you must resemble your mother, or do you not? I believe she had a dangerous beauty——"

"Fernande, do you know where Charlotte is?" hastily interrupted the old lady. "I have not seen her since this noon. Heaven knows where she has hid herself."

"Here I am," laughed a fresh, young voice, and the slender girl's figure that I had seen flying through the vestibule stood in the room. The sunniest smile lay on the girlish face; two long, yellow, glittering braids hung down her back. One could see the two were sisters from the strong resemblance, and yet no two could be more unlike in manner than they.

"O, the little cousin!" she cried, still laughing and hurrying to me; "welcome, Lena; that is the name, isn't it?" she continued, stretching out both hands to me. "You see, I remembered your name from your guardian's letter; and how little you are!" She laughed and shook her head until the braids flew.

"Do not be childish," rebuked her mother, and stood up. "Go now and make your toilet; Melanie von Stelten is already here, and it is high time."

"I am not going, mamma," declared the girl, emphatically, as she turned from me.

"But, Lotta," cried the sister, "you are not in earnest, dear?"

"Yes," she persisted, "I have no desire, this lovely summer evening, to shut myself up in a stiflingly hot hall and dance in the intolerable heat. Gerhardt is

of my opinion. I had rather go for an hour's walk in the park; it will be pleasanter and healthier."

"You see, mamma," pettishly said the young woman, "Gerhardt is of her opinion. Whenever it concerns carrying out her crazy freaks, she appeals to him. I think," she turned to the young girl, "you have strolled enough in the park to-day, and——"

"And I forbid these excursions, once for all, Charlotte, now that Robert is here. It is not at all proper for you; you are no longer a child," commanded Frau von Demphoff. "Were you with Aunt Edith to-day?" she asked, imperatively, as the young face before her flushed and the pretty head drooped.

"Yes," she answered, firmly, again raising her head, "to-day, as every day. I see no reason to remain away because Robert came. We have played together as children, and besides, we are cousins; moreover, Robert is no longer here."

She turned hastily and left the room.

"You see how it is. What can we do?" complained the sister. "Gerhardt is always on her side, and we are powerless, mamma!"

She stopped suddenly, from the adjoining room came the sound of a man's voice—soft and appeasing, as one speaks to a child.

"You will accompany them, little one, if mamma is so desirous you should, won't you?" The young woman stepped into the room where her brother was.

"I am very glad, dear Gerhardt," we heard her say, "that you have so decided. She had set up her irritating obstinacy again to-day, although she knew very well that they gave the tiresome party on her account. Do go, Lotta, and make your toilet," she begged.

"Your boy is in great delight, Fernande," said the man's

voice again; "I just saw him in the stable; he sat, shouting for joy, on the back of one of Gottlieb's old horses."

"That is absurd; it is revolting! Gerhardt, I hope you took him off immediately. Mademoiselle is a very untrustworthy person if she would allow him to be put on the horse. I suppose if he should fall off, and come under the horse's hoofs, it would be an unfortunate accident! No one would hold himself responsible!"

She spoke excitedly, and her voice had become somewhat sharp.

"No, I did not take him down; Gottlieb held him with both hands, as he held you, when you were a child, Fernande. I remember it very distinctly," he said, quietly.

"I will not permit it; he shall not have anything to do with my child. I distrust him. He is constantly doing something to irritate me. He was extremely rude to Anna to-day, and declared to her he didn't care whether I received my dress at the right time or not, and positively refused to drive any faster."

"I will inquire into the matter, Ferra," he replied, calmly.

"It isn't necessary, as long as I have told you," she pouted; "besides, Gerhardt," she continued, after a moment's thought, "we have a witness here." The next moment the beautiful face of the young woman appeared between the *portières*, and looked over to me, who still sat in hat and wrap, in the same place as when I entered. My aunt had already begun writing again, and apparently had not noticed the talk between her children.

"Cousin," the voice was really sharp now, "was not Gottlieb very impudent to my Anna?"

I do not know how it came; perhaps there lay too much bold challenge in her glance, to deny her question if I

dared, or perhaps the abhorrence of the lie entirely overcame my shyness; at any rate, I answered "No" in no uncertain tone. "Gottlieb was very much provoked with her, for we had to wait a frightfully long time for her, and——"

The blonde head vanished, and directly after a silvery laugh struck my ear. Lotta was evidently much amused at my frankness.

"What? Did Fräulein von Demphoff come with your maid?" questioned Cousin Gerhardt's deep voice. "How did that happen, Ferra? You promised to bring her yourself."

"Heavens, Gerhardt—yes—I—I would have done it—but afterward I remembered that I promised Melanie von Stelten to take her for a drive; so I went to the cloister and told Gottlieb to go, and then Anna could go with him at the same time; I—— Do not be angry, Gerhardt," she said, caressingly; "the child has arrived safe and sound."

He did not answer; but at that moment a man's form came between the blue curtains. I almost cried aloud from astonishment and terror. This tall, slender man so resembled my father, feature for feature, as he so clearly lived in my remembrance. The same wealth of blonde hair and beard, the same clear eyes that were there searching for me, only there was a slight pallor on the face, which denoted imperfect health, and I noticed that he stooped somewhat as he walked.

"Welcome to Wendhusen," he said, coming over to me, and he was evidently surprised; "but I see you are still in hat and mantle. Pardon the ladies who have no thought for anything but the reunion to-day. Without doubt mamma has already informed you that she has made arrangements for you to live with Aunt Edith, tempo-

rarily. The life here in the house might be painful to you, while your grief is so recent."

I looked anxiously into his face. Where were they going to take me?

My aunt turned around. "I had not yet told her, Gerhardt," she said, slowly. "Ferra came with her grievance, and then the letter—I am glad you have taken the matter in your own hands. You must be tired, child," she said, turning to me, a cold friendliness in her manner. "It is better for you to go over at once."

"Since when was this settled?" asked Fernande, coming suddenly into the room. "Yesterday you were very decided in your views to the contrary on this point."

"Mamma kindly adopted my proposition early this morning," replied Gerhardt, pleasantly, but not without irony. "A young woman in mourning would be very annoying to you, Ferra, quite setting aside her own feelings."

"A young woman!" laughed the beautiful woman. "Why, Gerhardt, where are your eyes? Look at the little one; she is a child, a veritable child, and under-sized at that. Pooh, what eyes she can make, when she looks up from under her brows in that way! Aunt Edith will be delighted to have such an acquisition."

"All the better for her, if she is still a child," he replied, quietly, without looking at me, during this personal description. "I hope, above all things, that Aunt Edith may find enjoyment in her young companion."

"You are right, dear Gerhardt," she said, in a changed voice, in which one could not recognize the least impatience; "take her to Aunt Edith, so far as I am concerned; if she wishes also a dozen cats, she is welcome to them. Moreover, I have no more time. You will accompany me to D—? Melanie is going with me."

"I am very sorry, sister, but I do not feel equal to-day to the fatigue of a ball——"

"You are not well, Gerhardt?" she interrupted him, and laid her delicate hands on his shoulders, looking at him with the most tender anxiety. "Dearest, best Gerhardt, why did you not tell me so directly? I assuredly should not have permitted a word of the reunion—naturally, I should have remained at home."

He turned from her impatiently. "I pray you, Ferra, to desist," he said. "You know this excessive sympathy for such trifling matters is decidedly unpleasant to me."

"Trifling, Gerhardt?" she asked, tenderly. "No, I do not look at it so. How ill you look, dearest Gerhardt! Not another word to me of the reunion. Mamma may take Lotta and Melanie; I shall remain with you."

"I prefer you would not, however," he said, coldly; "and as a proof that I am not such an object of suffering and sympathy as you seem to think, I will tell you that I have an appointment with the Inspector, to look over his accounts; consequently, you would only disturb me; therefore, go and amuse yourself, if you can. Before anything else, however," he stepped to the door and pulled the bell-cord, "respect must be paid to Fräulein von Demphoff."

"Mother," he turned to the old lady, who was still writing, "have you any suggestions in regard to our guest?"

"No," she replied, shortly, without taking the trouble to turn around.

"Have you informed Joachim—I take it you are writing to him—that the price of the bloodhound is considerably beyond my consideration?"

"No," she answered, even more shortly, "I will buy the hound of him."

"You, mamma?" He looked over to her, evidently unpleasantly surprised. "Very well," he continued, "he was too high-priced for me."

At this moment a neat house-maid entered.

"Will you have the goodness," he turned to me and said kindly, "to follow the maid? She will see that you get the rest and refreshment that you must surely need."

I got up and said adieu to my aunt.

"Adieu, my child," she replied, turning around and giving me a cursory glance.

I turned to take leave of my cousin, Ferra, and found she was no longer present. Gerhardt accompanied me to the stairs.

"I will come to-morrow, and learn how you have rested, Cousin," said he, pleasantly; "in advance I will wish you a refreshing sleep."

It was after sunset. The twilight lay over the earth, when I followed my leader through the carpeted corridor and down the marble steps. The cool evening air was very acceptable on my heated face. The road through the park, into which we turned, lay in deep shadow. I turned once again my head to look back at the fairy-house I had just left. Its white walls shone out from the dark background of the trees, and its contour stood out sharply on the evening sky. The spray of the fountain splashed softly in the granite basin, and made the broad, fan-shaped leaves of the surrounding plants sway and nod, and out of the luxuriant thickets gleamed the marble statues in dazzling whiteness. How lovely it was here! and yet if I could only have run away—away as far as my tired feet could carry me—to George, to Christiana—to anybody that would look at me with kind eyes; that would affectionately call me "Lena, dear Lena." What had I in common with these people? They would

never love me; I was only a burden to them that they would endeavor to make as easy as possible. Heaven-wide was the distance between us; disdain, raillery, and cold, business-like friendship, that was what would be given out to the stranger child. And now, where were they taking me? Who was this Aunt Edith, and what did the beautiful young woman mean, with her allusion to the cats? Mechanically, I followed the girl through the intricate way.

"It is not far to the cloister," she began in a friendly tone; "you can already hear the singing."

I listened. Was I going then into a real cloister? But no; that was no holy anthem. A quite familiar folk-song came to my ear:

"Oh, wert thou in the cold blast."

"Where is the singing?" I asked.

"In the servants' quarters, under the linden," was the answer. "It is the girls and boys; it is after working hours—see, there is the cloister; and behind the lighted windows above, lives your Aunt Edith."

There it lay before me, in the dusk of the gathering night, awesome, massive, and gloomy—that long, irregular building, that was now to be my home. An iron gate separated me from the front garden that bounded the wings of the cloister, which were connected with it at right angles. The double gate was thrown open; I saw the girl step into the drive-way, and heard her feet on the gravel on the other side of the gate.

My eyes were fixed on the gloomy structure. The lower windows were barred with iron, like a prison, and the wing at my left, confined by a high wall, had closed shutters. The whole made an unspeakably uncomfortable impression upon me.

I had hung behind; the maid came back for me; hesitating, I stepped over the carriage-drive and through the gate; we walked around a grass-plat enclosed with iron chains; in the middle stood a sandstone urn filled with trailing vines; a large, iron-bound door that opened into the right wing, led direct to a broad, massive, wooden stairway. Cool, moist air enveloped me; I shuddered and drew back before the uncanny darkness that lay under the arched hall; involuntarily, I thought of ghostly apparitions, that unheard would come toward the stranger, angry at the intrusion into the consecrated rooms; then I heard tripping little steps behind me, and children's voices, and little heads peered behind the house door.

"Cats' aunt! Cats' aunt!" they called to one another, and a high-pitched, piping little voice sang:

"Dacht' es fiel 'ne Katz 'von der Bank,
Ein Kind nur war es, Gott sei Dank."

Shrilly it rang back from the high, stone walls; I stood where I was; the girl, however, turned, and as swift as a weasel, rushed back down the stairs and, fortunately, seized one of the little screamers by the jacket.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself? You naughty child!" she cried, shaking the little boy back and forth. "You will make sport of the good woman that every Christmas remembers you; that gives you clothes and school-money; you ungrateful creature!"

The young one broke out into woeful tears.

"Jette, Jette, let him go!" called down a soft, sweet voice; and turning around, I saw, close before me, the figure of a lady, dressed in black; her white cap and pale face showed clearly in the dusk, and two small hands were stretched toward me.

"Welcome, my child!" she said, softly. I felt a kiss on my forehead, and a tear, another, and yet another, and my head lay on her breast. "My poor little girl," she whispered; "God bless the hour that brought you to me!—but now, come, come, that I may see you in the light," breaking off from the solemn tone in which she had first spoken.

"Jette, let the little fellow go, he did not know what he was doing; he only did as the others. Prepare the tea; my little guest must be both hungry and thirsty."

By her side I walked down a long corridor which was almost dark, and then I stepped into a large, lighted room, with old-fashioned furniture and hangings. A lamp burned on the snow-white covered table; and now a pair of gentle eyes were regarding me, so dear, so good, that I felt as if I had suddenly come from snow and ice into warm sunshine. Involuntarily, I flung my arms around the neck of this stranger and wept all the anxiety of the last hour away.

She let me have the comfort of my tears a few moments, then she raised my head.

"Now, that is enough, child," she said, soothingly; "come, let me look at you—you are exactly such a Liliputian as your mother was, scarcely three feet high! Shame, child! hurry up and grow, or you will never be able to look anyone in the face."

I laughed.

"Ah, yes, Cousin Fernande even called me a child," and it almost seemed as if my old merriment was coming back again, that had flown away in these last weeks of sorrow and care.

Then, as I sat down to the table and consumed, with healthy appetite, the dainty slices of buttered bread before me, and drank the fresh milk, I shouted aloud, as a

snow-white cat, with a light rustle, sprang upon my shoulder, and rubbed her soft fur lovingly against my face.

"Well, well," cried joyfully the old lady, "Minka is making friends with you directly. She is very shy, usually; that delights me! that quite delights me!" she repeated, and stroked the glossy fur of her pet.

I remembered suddenly that Frau von Demphoff had spoken of a dozen cats, and then the verse:

"Dacht' es fiel 'ne Katz 'von der Bank,
Ein Kind nur war es, Gott sei Dank."

Involuntarily, I looked around the room. Were there any more? Surely, there, out of the dark corner by the fire-place, shone two greenish cat's eyes; in the easy-chair by the window stretched itself comfortably a black-and-white Tabby, and there, behind in the corner, sat, cowering together, two spotted kittens. Alarmed, I laid down my knife and fork on my plate, and raised my glance questioningly to the fine, old face opposite me.

"Do you not like the cats, child?" she asked, and looked almost grieved.

"O, yes, but so—"

"So many, you think?" she finished. "Never mind, child, you will get used to them, and willingly, when I tell you that for long years the cats were my only companions; and they have never troubled nor angered me," she concluded, and glanced, smiling sadly, over to Minka, who had made herself comfortable on my shoulder.

"O, no, I like cats very much," I hastened to say, although a little fear still remained.

"Truly? That pleases me," she cried. "You will see that they are wise as human beings, and besides—" She stopped and looked kindly at me. "Now, little one, come to me on the sofa," she begged, "and if you are

not tired, tell me of your mother. Have you not a little brother?"

"O, yes!" I quickly answered, and nearly wept again for longing and thought of him.

But the dear old lady drew my head down, and comforted me in such a sweet way. She talked to me of the future, and that at my years all sorrow was but a dark cloud that would pass over, and only make the sunshine that follows more appreciated. She talked so consolingly and gently, that I was more at peace than for many, many weeks.

"Who are you, really, Auntie?" I inquired, half asleep, as she tucked me up, with loving hand, under the faded green-silk quilt in the great canopy bed, in which my little person was almost lost. She had come with me to my room—which was next her own—with true motherly, almost ceremonious, solicitude. I was very tired, and saw with only half-open eyes how the slender figure went noiselessly about the dimly-lighted room.

"You know already," she said, softly, laughing. "'Cats' Aunt' the children call me. You shall call me Aunt Edith—will you? Over in the villa they call me 'Aunt' only. My name is Edith ——" She said a name that I did not clearly understand. "And am a real——, but later about that. You do not understand, so sleep, Lena, and dream something beautiful." She pressed a kiss on my forehead. "Did you never hear your mother speak of me?" she questioned.

I sleepily shook my head; my eyes were closed for very weariness.

"Why should she!" she said, low, as to herself, "she was so young at that time—"

Then I heard no more of what she said. Sleep had come and laid itself heavily on my forehead, till sud-

denly, with a loud "George!" I sprang up, frightened; I had seen him so plainly stretch his hands toward me, and he looked so ill and wretched—

"Sleep, Lena, do not fear for George," came the low, sweet voice of Aunt Edith. "Do you believe no longer in the angel that each child has? Think of that, dear, and you will be comforted."

"True, dear Auntie," I said, with a little sob, already half in the sleep that soon sweet and sure rested on my tired eyes.

When I awoke in the morning I could not think for a moment where I was. Above my head was a canopy of heavy green-silk stuff, and stiff, gilt fringe hung full around it; the faded—here and there yellow-streaked—curtains of my bed were thrown back, and my sleepy glance took in a high room that the morning sun had filled with a blinding light.

A monster of a chimney, with black marble facing, was opposite my bed; a high mirror graced the wall over it. This must be very old, for its immense surface was joined in three pieces, and the frame formed a narrow, but richly carved, gilt ledge.

The furniture belonged, without doubt, to different periods, for near a wonderful inlaid commode, with rounded drawers and glittering garnishment, stood a little table, with fragile gilt legs, that were so marvelously twisted and curved that one saw at a glance it must thank the frivolous Rococo time for its origin.

The carpet showed in blue-gray shades a constantly repeated woman's figure on a dolphin—whose tail ended in a gracefully curved arabesque—that boldly swam through the high-crested waves. A broad flower-border ran around the walls above the floor and also under the ceiling, which had massive rafters.

Evidently this house was built to endure, for the powerful walls, in which were deep window niches, appeared to defy eternity.

A comfortable feeling came over me in that room flooded with sunshine. I snuggled my head into the snow-white pillow and shut my blinking eyes, till a clear, rich voice aroused me out of the blissful condition between sleeping and waking.

The door into the next room, that had been closed before, now stood wide open, and I caught a glimpse of a slender white figure and two long braids that hung down her back.

"She is still asleep, Auntie," said the same bright, fresh voice; "I was close to her bed; she lies with parted lips and the black hair hangs over the brown, little face. What a strange little human child to us, who are accustomed to seeing such great blonde giants. Come, Minka, my darling."

The white figure stooped and picked up the cat, and then suddenly sat down on the window seat. The straw hat flew on the nearest chair, and I recognized the rosy face of my Cousin Charlotte, who apparently had come to pay her aunt a morning visit, and in a very happy frame of mind.

She dangled her feet, that were clad in little open-work slippers, hugged and stroked Minka, and meantime trilled a melody with a soft, inexpressibly sweet voice, like the bird that sings in its sleep.

"Do not waken the child, Lottchen," admonished Aunt Edith in a low voice, and as she spoke, her graceful figure, in the simple gray morning dress, came within the circle of my vision, and sat down in the reclining chair near Charlotte. Her back was toward me, but I had a full view of her pretty white morning cap.

Suddenly, Charlotte was still.

"Auntie," she questioned, in a somewhat subdued voice, but still so that I heard distinctly each word, "Auntie, is it true what Fernande said to Melanie von Stelten yesterday evening, when we were driving to D— that the mother of that little one in there—now, how shall I say it—well in short—was an actress, who, through her unheard-of extravagance, completely ruined poor uncle?"

I shut my eyes. I felt as if one had given me a blow. My mother an actress! My mother—her dear face came before me. Her dainty figure, as she sat at the window, the dear finger wounded with the ceaseless sewing— "Unheard-of extravagance!"—O, if Fernande had known her! "So? Did Ferra relieve her mind?" questioned Aunt Edith. "It must have been very interesting, Lottchen, and the drive over all too soon for you?"

"O, yes, Aunt Edith, it did interest me. You know in almost every family there comes out some little piquant scandal; only in ours—thanks to the incomparably calm, passionless blood of the Demphoffs—in this connection, we seemed to have escaped everything exciting."

"Charlotte!" cried Aunt Edith, rebukingly.

A silvery musical laugh answered her.

"It is true, Aunt Edith, and so I thought it extremely interesting. Just think what a change a romantic passion must make in a quiet, tiresome, stupid family life.

"There are the scenes with the gentleman's parents: The son threatens to take his life, the mother plans amusements to distract him and make him forget his passion, the father proposes a journey, the sisters invite a half-dozen marriageable friends to visit them, and finally one reads in the local paper some morning:

"'In our midst has occurred a most romantic episode, considering the present *blasé* period. The son of one of our first families has married—in spite of the most energetic opposition—a young actress, who understood, through her beauty, so to fascinate the young cavalier, that he —'

"Really, Auntie, was it like that?" she asked, lowering her declamatory tone.

"Was that the way Ferra told the story, Charlotte?"

"Very similar, Auntie, only more in detail; more colored," replied my cousin.

"Fernande knew this story much too little to relate it," said Aunt Edith, earnestly, "and as a proof in one particular, the mother of the little one never set foot on the boards, so she could not well be an actress; and I beg you seriously, Charlotte, never to speak of her again in this manner."

"Do you know the true story, Auntie?" said the young girl, enticingly. "Did you ever see the woman that forever separated papa and uncle?"

"I saw her once only, Lotta," said Aunt Edith. "I know very well the sad story, that even to-day is not understood. This woman, Charlotte, this little child-like woman, with the great, dark eyes, was truly the innocent cause of the discord, but on her lay a very small share of the blame. She had the pure, sweet spirit of a child—no coquette, as they seemed to have represented her to you."

Good, Aunt Edith.

My heart went out to her in gratitude. She had taken my mother's part against that young girl there, who would judge her in the thoughtlessness of a nature who yet has no idea of what happiness means. I opened my eyes and looked at her. She sat there very quiet, and

her glance rested on Aunt Edith's face without betraying any real interest.

"Pray tell me what you know, sweetest of aunts," she begged. "You will be doing a good deed. First, you will compensate me for the avowedly stupid reunion yesterday; secondly, that I can prove to Ferra that I am much better informed in the matter than she."

"Is that your only reason for wishing to know this sad story, Charlotte?" said Aunt Edith, seriously.

Charlotte lowered her eyes and was silent.

"I am very sorry to have to say it, Charlotte," continued Aunt Edith, "but you have come back from the pension superficial beyond expression. I am more and more convinced it is so; you are no more the tender-hearted little girl that so easily found tears for others' unhappiness. You wish to enjoy your life; to amuse yourself seems to be your only aim."

A moment the young girl stretched out her hands toward her aunt, entreatingly; then her head drooped again, and she remained silent.

"I will tell you willingly as much as I know," began Aunt Edith anew, "but it is very little; and I only do it to allow you a glimpse into that life that you know nothing of, and that deceives you like an alluring play, and in which you think only beautiful things can befall you. I would not take away your sunny cheerfulness, not for the world; but train yourself not to pass by misfortune indifferently, or treat it as an amusing theme of conversation. In each human heart, Hope's flower fails at some time to mature. You can not be spared your sorrow, dear child.

"It is only a short story that you will hear, but it contains a world of pain, Charlotte," began Aunt Edith, while I lay with beating heart and listened to her words:

"Herman von Demphoff, the father of our little sleeper, and the brother of your father, was the younger son, as you know, and consequently received only a very moderate fortune, barely sufficient to make the career of an officer possible to him. In his garrison he learned to know the girl who was so fatal to him. It happened in the house of her uncle, who called her his adopted daughter. I believe if the affair had proved to be as it seemed at that time, your father would have scarcely raised an objection to the union of the pair, for the old uncle was a respectable man, and considered wealthy.

"Then he died suddenly, and no will was found, and the young girl, accustomed to every possible luxury, was left as poor as a beggar.

"The really great wealth fell to a distant relative, who took not the slightest notice of the impoverished young thing.

"Your uncle came here worn with anxiety, and begged admission for his little bride; then the storm broke. Unfortunately, I heard almost nothing of what occurred in the Abbess House, in the family of your father. I, myself, at that time was in deep sorrow.

"I learned of the quarrel only through Gottlieb, and that Hermann after a stormy scene drove to the next post-station. He was also angry with me. So I received no intelligence of his marriage, which was celebrated soon afterward. I first saw it in the newspaper. Soon after the wedding the brother must have relented in a measure, for Hermann and his young wife were invited to make a visit to Cloister Wendhusen. Not until the guest-chamber, which was opposite my room, was opened, not until Gottlieb in fine livery with the state carriage rolled through the gate-way to bring the guests, did I learn

from my questions that the young married pair were expected!

"I was at that time too much accustomed to the painful neglect of my brothers and sisters to be wounded by this. I was looked upon as one dead. Nay, worse; for a beloved one, dead, has once in awhile a flower laid on the grave. But—that does not belong here.

"There *is* something of the spaniel nature in some women's hearts, Lottchen, as they say. Instead of withdrawing myself deep in my room, and nursing my wounded pride, for long hours I stood that day watching behind the curtain to see my youngest brother's wife, and himself as a happy husband.

"But I met with disappointment, for I could not see into the covered carriage, and aside from a blue veil that fluttered in the spring breeze, I saw nothing of my new sister-in-law. And later, nothing, for I was taken ill, and had to remain in bed. But below I could hear a soft, musical woman's voice, and light feet flitting along the corridor. Beautiful, wonderfully beautiful she was, my servants told me. 'Oh, My Lady, like one of the holy ones that hang over the altar in the Catholic church in Ellingen; and she is like a little doll. Oh, so little,' they would say. Nearly two weeks went by before I found myself able to sit up; it was a hot June day, and even the twilight was not able to soften the oppressive sultriness. I heard, as I lay on my sofa in the dusk, tired and weak, again outside in the corridor the tripping, light feet—it was almost a run, and soon the door of the guests' room was slammed violently; after awhile a man's hasty tread sounded down the corridor, and again the door opened, and the voice of my youngest brother resounded through the house. 'The matter is settled, Elsie; we shall leave immediately!' At the

same time I could hear suppressed weeping, bitter weeping.

"In an instant I had opened my door, the one opposite mine was thrown far back. I could see over the room, and recognized in the roseate twilight of the setting sun, a slender white figure on the sofa, and my brother before her on his knees, speaking low and soothing words.

"'Hermann, I did nothing bad. Oh, I shall die with shame; let me go away, Hermann; let me go away from here,' she begged again and again; and a young, tearful face, full of unspeakable charm, raised up from the pillow and laid itself against his cheek!

"'Yes, yes, dear, only calm yourself; the packing must be done, and you are excited to the highest pitch. Did you believe for one moment that I doubted you? My heaven! who could fancy such a thing?'

"He arose and went over to the table, and the next moment it flew clattering across the room, and the fragments of a crystal water *carafe* lay glistening on the carpet. The young wife sprang upon her feet in fright and looked at her husband with great, startled eyes.

"'Not a glass of water in this hospitable house when one needs it!' he cried, with suppressed anger, and he pulled the bell-cord; then the door was slammed.

"Embarrassed, I also closed mine, and puzzled my brain to fathom what could have happened. The sound of horses' hoofs called me to the window, and I saw your father, Lottchen, quite against his habit, riding away in the dusk, and before he returned, Hermann and his young wife had left Wendhusen, never to return.

"I never could forget the charming face, with the glorious dark eyes that looked up so shy and question-

ing from under the long lids. And later, when the rumor came to us that she lived in the direst poverty, I could not resist sitting down and writing to her, and begging her to accept assistance from me, even though the sum was small. My letter came back unopened. She may never have known who the writer was. I do not believe she knew that a sister of her husband existed; she may have thought the letter was from your mother. So I remained a stranger to her always, when I so gladly would have been near to her.

"Once again I made an attempt, but again the letter was returned to me through the post, with a short sentence from a delicate woman's hand, the substance being, that no letter from Wendhusen would be accepted.— This was nearly a year after Hermann's death."

"But, Auntie," interrupted Charlotte, "you have said nothing in favor of exonerating Uncle Hermann's wife. Ferra says she, through her extravagance, ——"

"Charlotte! Shall Ferra influence you with her judgment? 'Tis true, the young pair lived handsomely, as their circumstances in life forced them to do, as befitted their station; but the fault was the husband's. She believed him to be rich, believed his means sufficient to permit them to carry on such a brilliant style of living. Without misgiving, she lived in the luxury he lavished upon her! I am convinced if he had only given her an intimation of the truth she would gladly have joined hands with him, and lived simply as their means required."

"Why do you infer that, Aunt Edith?"

"By the way and manner in which she atoned for the mistake she made through ignorance. Or do you not think it is an atonement, Charlotte, if the woman, with the sacrifice of her entire strength, procured by her

hands day and night—her tender hands unaccustomed to work—support for herself and children, and brought them up respectably and honorably? Do you not think that hours of such toil and achievement, in tears and humbled pride, can make good the wrongs done in ignorance? Can you imagine, Charlotte, what it must be, night after night, to work until the small hours, by a dim lamp, with painful thoughts for company? Do you know what it means, when one must say to himself, 'when I have no longer strength to work, then must I starve, and those that belong to me?' No, child, you do not know; may God keep you from the knowledge."

"Aunt," said Charlotte, entreatingly, "dear Aunt."

I did not see what she did; as she spoke, I had thrown myself on my side, and buried my head deep in the pillow, that they might not hear my sobs, which tore my breast.

I felt a kiss on my hair, and as I turned over, my eyes fell on my Cousin Lotta, who was kneeling by my bed.

"I will love you, little cousin," she said, and the blue eyes glistened with tears, although the sweet mouth smiled. "I will love you; forgive me for what I said in arrogance, for you heard me, I am sure. Come here, you tiny creature, and give me a kiss," she said, drawing me to her, and kissing me. "You are not angry with me? No?" and her sunny face grew very earnest as she questioned me.

I shook my head and put my arms around her neck. "I will love you also, Charlotte," I assured her with a sincere heart.

"But now you must get up," she cried, raising up from her kneeling posture and returning to her natural tone; "may I be your maid?"

With merriest chatter, and laughing and tittering, she helped me to dress.

"You have no idea what is going to happen to you," she teased. "Yes, yes, you little town miss, you are now in the country of cows and calves, and they are very renowned in Cloister Wendhusen. Grass, flowers, trees, and fresh air we have in abundance; only wait, you shall soon have red cheeks." She stroked her hand caressingly over my face, as she helped me tuck my braids in the net.

"Charlotte," I asked, "is Aunt Edith called Frau Berker or Berka?"

She laughed merrily and clapped her hands. "Child, do you not know that? Aunt Berka."

"I had never heard of her," I replied. "Mamma never talked to us of Cloister Wendhusen."

"Why, child, you have not known either, all this time, who *I* am," she called, in comic despair. "That must not be any longer, so listen; I will present to you our entire family in order."

She sat down on the side of my bed, and looked over to me, as she began to count on her fingers.

"Number one, self-evident, my mother, the Frau von Demphoff, *née* von Thienen of Thüringen, held in the greatest respect by her children and inferiors. When Ferra and I speak of her, we call her Serenissima. Ferra and Joachim are her darlings, Gerhardt and I take second place. I receive very many harsh words from her, because —but that belongs to my personal description.

"Number two, Leopold Gerhardt von Demphoff, heir and chief of the family, my golden brother, the best, noblest man living. But, unfortunately, he is a little bit of an invalid," she said, half to herself, and a shadow crept into the bright eyes. "He will be well again, I know it,

Lena," she said, evidently reassuring herself. "If you have at any time a request to make, go to him; he will not say no.

"Number three, my beautiful sister Fernande von Riedingen, who has lived under her father's roof for two years, because her husband was so unfortunate as to get thrown at the races in R—,which ended his life and made her a widow. She has worn the deepest black for a year and a half; it is so extremely becoming to blonde hair—"

"Lotta, Lotta!" cried Aunt Edith, who just then entered the room, "you have dropped again into the old habit." Then she came over to me, and kissed me affectionately. "Have you slept well?" she asked. "I see you are being introduced to all that belong to the family—"

"Number four," interrupted Charlotte, "Joachim von Demphoff, lieutenant in the Ninth Cuirassier Regiment, a very handsome man, cavalier *comme il faut*, with all that belongs to that, virtues and faults, adores the hunt next to the ballet."

"I pray you to cease, Lotta; what will Magdalena think of you?" said Aunt Edith, somewhat vexed.

"Number five, Charlotte von Demphoff, *enfant terrible*, shocks every member of the family, sees everything she should not see, and hears what is not meant that she should, a quite disagreeable character. Whoever she pursues with her love can not save themselves. Enjoys most to stay in Cloister Wendhusen with Aunt Edith and be scolded by her. Oh, you good, only Aunt Edith, you!" she cried, impetuously, taking her in her arms. "I only ask one thing, do not give me reason to be jealous of that one there."

"You wild creature, let me go, you are squeezing the breath out of me!" cried auntie; "if you do not do

differently, it is quite possible the little one will dispute your ground with you."

"There, Lena, have a care!" she threatened, running into the next room with such a breeze that two or three of Auntie's pets flew over to her, startled out of their wits. "I will set all Auntie's cats on you, in that case, and that is no little thing, for the yellow spotted one has six young ones."

She appeared again in the door, brandishing her big straw hat at us, and then she was gone. We heard her fresh, merry laugh echo in the corridor.

"Now I know who you are," I said, drawing Aunt Edith's arm around my neck; "you are my dear father's only sister."

She stroked my hair tenderly. "Your father's sister," she repeated softly, and continued: "Child, child, how much you resemble your mother; the same eyes, quite the same."

"Auntie, I thank you," I said, and kissed the hand I held. "If I had known how good you are—mamma must have written to you, and not to Aunt Demphoff, that she needed help. You would not have answered that she was guilty of my father's misfortune."

She pushed me suddenly back and looked at me, quite pale.

"What? Your mother wrote to her and she replied as you say?"

I nodded assent. "She was very ill after that and she talked of it in her delirium."

Aunt Edith was silent; she gazed into the green foliage that stirred outside in the golden morning light. An indescribably bitter expression lay around her mouth. Then she stepped to the window, and as she opened the heavy blind she turned to me with the words:

"Now come, Magdalena, to breakfast; it is very late to-day. To-morrow, I shall call you early. I always take a walk through the park in the morning, and you shall accompany me. You have no idea how lovely it is, you poor little town-mouse."

CHAPTER III.

That was the day of my arrival in Wendhusen, and my first awaking. Almost five years have passed since that morning, and yet it stands out with such clearness before my mind, that I could almost think that it was only yesterday that I—a little inexperienced, homesick girl—awakened under Aunt Edith's green-canopied bed and listened to the conversation that started a thousand questions in my childish heart—as if it were only yesterday that Charlotte kneeled by my bed and promised, with tears and laughter, to love me— this whimsical, dear creature, who seemed composed of smiles and tears, and to whom life suddenly became all tears; but, God be thanked, finally changed back to smiles.

Ah, Lottchen, if you have not long known that I love you, I will here make my love's declaration, with the remembrance of all that we mutually experienced and suffered.

Also, that day stands out clearly before me, as I then, for the first time, went on a voyage of discovery in the old cloister. I think it was the first day; Aunt Edith went to visit a sick woman in the town. I sat all alone in a deep window niche, looking over the grass plat, away over the high tops of the park trees, behind which the villa lay concealed. It was uncomfortably still in the great building, and outside was no trace of life. At one side lay the Abbess House, with its rows of shuttered windows with deep shadows over the long flight of

steps, or stairs; the tendrils of the wild vines grew in unrestrained freedom; they had made a net-work over the steps, and hung in great, luxuriant garlands over the massive house door, till it looked as if it might be the entrance to little Brier-rose's enchanted castle. And behind those windows my father had lived a happy child. Over the moss-grown steps, in later years, my mother's little feet had tripped into the house in which she had been so harshly treated. What could they have done to her, who was so good, so beautiful? If one could only go into those rooms; but they had been locked since Uncle's death.

Why?

Everything that I had seen and heard seemed so enigmatical! A little paroxysm of terror overcame me. I sprang up and ran into the corridor. The long hall was always in a twilight, even with the most glaring sunshine outside, and deep shadows were concealed in corners and niches. Where were the rooms my parents had occupied on that visit? Opposite, surely; there, across the hall.

I stood before one of the high, dark, carved doors that were in regular distance along the whitewashed wall. I peeped through the key-hole, and saw a little strip of carpet, with large flowered pattern. A cool air blew toward me; evidently the windows were open in there. Aunt Edith had told me that during the hunting season, when there were many guests, these rooms were always used as sleeping-rooms; they called this wing the "lodging-house." In the palmy days of the cloister, not only the massive stone building, but the Abbess House, was used for this purpose, and, judging from the number and size of the rooms, the pious Sisters must have been eminently hospitable.

The charm of it all suddenly took possession of me; this mysterious half-light in the deserted building.

Legends of old knights' castles, in whose galleries the lady of the castle went to and fro in trailing silken robes, and little round cap, embroidered in gold, the pocket and bunch of keys by her side, came to my mind. Yes, there was charm, but mixed with fear, in rummaging in these old rooms that had not been lived in for years, yet that once had seen so much, so much.

On tip-toe I stole down the endlessly long passage. Here and there a streak of light out of a key-hole fell on the old gray floor, and there at the end of the corridor was a bright light. A few steps led down into the Abbess House, but first, into a large whitewashed hall, the windows covered with linen curtains. Beautifully carved dark folding-doors led to the rooms; large antlers ornamented the walls, and from the ceiling hung a large glass bell, in an old-fashioned brass hoop, evidently designated for the reception of a lamp. Here, also, I peered through a key-hole, with bated breath and throbbing heart—these must be the rooms in which my father was born and grew up. But I could not spy more than a little strip of brown leather hanging with gilt decoration, and a little piece of the gilt frame of a picture.

Aunt Edith must tell me all about it, I thought, and before I really knew where I was, I found myself on the upper step of a broad staircase that began to creak uncomfortably under my light weight. For a moment I hesitated, then I ran hurriedly down, raising a mighty cloud of dust with my dress.

Another locked door near the foot of the stairs; no, a pressure on the latch opened it; it flew back with an uncanny screech that went through the whole scale. I almost screamed aloud with astonishment and surprise—

I believed myself set back many hundred years. It seemed a picture out of the Middle Ages—the vaulted roof of the large, airy, broad passage, with its pointed arches, which were held together with delicately-carved stone rosettes. There were no outside walls; only slender, spiral columns. Climbing roses and wild vines hung their luxuriant tendrils downward like airy curtains, and underneath, away, the glance roved over flowery grass-plats in the thick, green wilderness of noble old trees. The brilliant sheen of a midday sun lay on the green turf; no sound broke the stillness; I strolled lingeringly between the columns, out on to the grass-grown garden-walk. White butterflies fluttered in swarms over the beds whose plants ran wild; the tendrils of the centifolious (evenly woven into a net-work, the border of box-shrub) grew far out in the path and, as if resenting my presence, caught on my dress and held me fast, and here and there a statue gleamed out from dark shadows, almost overgrown with ivy, which thickly matted the trunks of the trees also.

As in a dream, I went on.

This was in very truth Brier-rose's enchanted garden, so world-forsaken, so weird in its solitude, it lay there in the light of the midday sun, which could not be entirely driven out, though reduced to twilight, by the roof of thick, green foliage.

The branches hung so low that they grazed my hair, and they concealed, also, with their wealth of leaves, the high walls which enclosed the garden, and made it seem immeasurable.

O, thou beautiful old cloister garden, how dear hast thou become to me!—almost the dearest spot on this great, round earth.

The immense park around the elegant villa, with its

Englishy, velvety lawn, and its broad flower pastures, vanished completely before this little grass-plat, with its field flowers flecking it with color. And on none of the modern easy-chairs could one sit so comfortably as on the old moss-grown stone bench under the two great linden trees which made with their branches the precious spot yet more secluded and secret.

Ah! how many hundred times have I sat there in pain and joy; over my head the swaying branches, and at my feet the half-sunken grave-stone of an old abbess, whose exact image, in life-size, with the garments in stiff folds, the hands crossed over the breast, adorned the place under which she had reposed already over two hundred years. The rain splashed on the sandstone; in the winter the snow-water trickled over it, but ever lay the fine, chiseled form in its resting-place, and ever one could read that "*Anno* 1558, the Right Reverend Abbess, Frau Magdalena Sibylla, Countess of the Empire, of Radeberg and Hohenstein, went to God, through Christ, in a blessed hour of death."

It was my favorite place, this old grave. I had pulled up the nettles and planted ivy and evergreen around, and in doing so thought of a dear, distant grave that stranger hands cared for; and felt that what I was doing to one long, long dead, in a way I was doing for my mother.

"That is right," said old Gottlieb later, from whom I had begged some plants; "that is right, gracious Fräulein, one must have something tangible, some place where he feels at home with his remembrances, and no other soul can follow with the thoughts. I feel just so. When I have a heavy heart — ah! Heaven, and who has not sometimes—then I go out of the room and go up into the garret, in the flax-room that was the pride of

my blessed old wife, her favorite place; and when my heart is full of hot blood and wrong thoughts, and I go in there and smell the flax, and see the yarn hanging there that her hands have spun, it is as if she said to me, 'Never mind, never mind; all will come right.'"

How many long conversations I have held with the honest old man in the cloister garden! He pointed out to me the window of my uncle's study, where the lamp sent out its rays into the quiet garden, often till long after midnight. Then his favorite path that he used to take every morning before breakfast to the sun-dial, over which was the strange device:

"*Memento Horæ Novissimæ.*"

He would tell me of the home life, how very different it was when the blessed master was living, and he (Gottlieb) was the family coachman. How, every Sunday morning at 7 o'clock exactly, the large carriage with the glass sides was at the door, and master, and mistress, and children, tutor, and governess, drove to Welsroda, to the church. And hurrah! Then in the afternoon they went to Littwitz, to the Istheims, or to Tromsdorf to see the Münchs, or to a picnic in the green woods, where coffee was made and there were singing and playing.

The household was happy, and the coachman had then, Sundays, in the servants' hall, roast pork and good home-brewed ale.

"Yes, yes, times are changed. In the present day, there are no more drives on Sunday, nor going to church. If the young master did not go, our young ladies would not go for a whole year. Yes, yes, but what business is it of mine? The world is round, and must turn itself, however. Nothing is any more what it used to be, at least not here."

Once I asked him, with some hesitation, why he was no longer the family coachman?

At first the good old face flushed, then became paler than usual.

"Because the mistress never forgave me that I was the one that drove Fräulein Edith that night. She treasured it against me; but so long as the master lived, the matter seemed to be forgotten. I received from him a hearty scolding, and that was the end of it. The mistress, however, had treasured it up in her heart, and four weeks after the master died, or thereabouts, Gottlieb must leave the place, out of the house; that is, he must do the driving for the inspectors and superintendent, and for Frau Berka, for no one could serve two masters. Think of that, old Gottlieb! That is on your account, I thought, and took my fine place. My old Frau was sick with anger. She was already, at that time, a feeble woman. I will not speak any more of that time; but I had to control myself that I did not strike to the earth everything that came in my way; as if I could do any different, when the gracious Fräulein said to me: 'Gottlieb, be at the garden gate this evening, with the dog-cart. I am going to drive.' That was a command; I must obey. That she did not come back with me—could I help that?"

"She did not come back, Gottlieb?"

"No, no, Fräulein; she remained where it pleased her better than here—yes; but you need know no more of the story. I know nothing further, only this. If I could to-day do her a favor, I would, if they drove me from the place the same evening."

Mysteries were continually weaving themselves around me, and my busy fancy held a thousand fabulous conjectures, which grouped themselves sometimes around my

mother, sometimes around Aunt Edith. For half a day I would muse over it, and nearly forget my anxiety and worry about George. Whenever the weather permitted I would slip off down-stairs to the cloister garden, and would come back with my arms full of flowers, with which I would decorate Auntie's room and my own. She let me do as I pleased, and would smilingly stroke my hair with a loving hand; and when I would crown the pretty lad's face over her sewing-table with roses and fresh green, she would laugh and nod.

"A splendid boy, isn't he, Lena? so will your George be. Do you not see a resemblance?"

Then I would bring out the little photograph of George, and we would compare, and after much looking we finally found really some resemblance, although my boy's dark face had very little in common with the one looking out from the frame, which was a face too earnest and thoughtful for its years.

Over eight days had passed. George and Christiana had already replied to my first letter, and my life had begun to move on in regular fashion. I helped to sew for the poor children; practiced, on an old-fashioned piano, scales and exercises; and had conversations with Aunt Edith in English and French; read much aloud—and, in short, I found myself from day to day more and more contented in the old cloister.

The stable-yard, a large inclosure behind the cloister building, also had a peculiar charm for me. The rooms opposite ours looked down into the yard. One of the smallest Aunt Edith used for a sort of store-room, and I would stand there by the hour at the window and look down.

For a city girl, it was wonderfully interesting to watch the bright-colored fowls, the stately dove-cote, the beau-

tiful white cows, and the immense four-horse hay wagon with its fragrant load. I would often see Cousin Gerhardt there. He would go from barns to stable with friendly greeting, and once, to my joy, I saw him driven back from the field by Gottlieb, and saw him give him a friendly nod, as he got out of the wagon. I was sure that pleased the good old man.

I saw none of the occupants of the villa, and even Cousin Gerhardt long ago must have forgotten that a strange little girl lived there with the quiet aunt. After that first night's rest, which he came to inquire after, as he promised, I had not seen him; and only once the ladies, when they drove rapidly through the park, and Charlotte had not once looked up to Auntie's windows. Aunt Edith did not appear to notice Charlotte's long absence. She never mentioned it, only it seemed to me she was restless and preoccupied, as if she were expecting something; and toward evening, when it was time for the postman, she would go down through the long corridor and bend, listening, over the heavy wooden balusters of the stairs; or, in case she had not returned punctually at that time from a sick visit, she would go directly to the corner cupboard and look where Jette usually put the mail matter, and there was always a mixture of anxiety and hope in the large eyes.

If she found only a newspaper, she would sit down with a sigh, at the window, with her hands close folded, and look out over the green tops of the trees; but after a while she would turn around to me with the old sweet smile. "Good evening, little one," she would say, and the cheerful hope was back again in her face, and she would call her pets.

"To-morrow is coming," she said one evening, half aloud, when I joyfully received a letter from George,

and to Aunt Edith's question, the postman had answered laconically, "nothing."

"How many letters have you had, child, in the fourteen days you have been here?" she asked one evening. "The little fellow will spoil you—only it is the first longing, and the first pain; is he well?"

I sat down on the estrade at her feet, and began to read my letter aloud; but I did not reach the end, because the longing drove the hot tears to my eyes, for George wrote complainingly. A button was torn off his Sunday jacket and the Frau Doctor had no time to sew it on.

I stopped reading, and my heart sank, while I thought how carefully the little boy's toilet was always kept by the mother's busy hands, and how vexing such slackness would be to the child, so accustomed to order, and I could not help him.

Aunt Edith could not have been listening, for she did not seem to notice that I had stopped reading. She was looking thoughtfully into the park, as she softly stroked the white fur of Minka, who sat near her on the window-seat. I was doubly wretched then, for I had never seen Aunt Edith unsympathetic before, and a feeling of rebellion at her neglect and indifference arose within me. I would have liked to give the white Minka a comfortable push out of the window, if it had been possible. Should I sit still and wait for Aunt Edith to turn again to me, or go to my room and have a good cry? But, before I came to a conclusion, the door opened, and Charlotte came into the room. She flew in great haste to Aunt Edith, and threw—way over me, so that her white muslin dress completely covered me—her arms around her neck, and, as I quickly slipped to one side, she kneeled in my deserted place and laid her head in

Aunt Edith's lap. That all happened in a moment, and the next instant I saw Aunt Edith's head bend over, and heard her softly ask a question, and Charlotte answered with almost heart-breaking sobs.

"Aunt, dear aunt, I can not keep my misery to myself any longer," she cried, raising her head and wiping away her tears. "I hear nothing the entire day but 'Be reasonable, child! We only desire the best for you! Only consider what we ask!' etc. Mamma seems to have entirely settled the matter in her own mind, and if I dare to make any opposition, says: 'We shall see,' and she positively forbids my talking over the matter with you. But to-day I could not bear it any longer. I declared to Ferra, with energy, that I should go to you now, on the spot, and beg your advice."

"That was foolish, dear," replied Aunt Edith. "If there is something concerning yourself, you can easily see how my advice would be judged in such matters. Child, you have acted rashly. Why do you not talk with Gerhardt?"

"Because he has not been at home for a week, dear Aunt."

"That is really too bad, my darling; now pour out your little heart. What do they require of you, Charlotte?"

Charlotte threw back her beautiful head, placed both arms again around Auntie's neck, looked up at her, and then her silvery laugh echoed through the high room.

"Oh, it is comical, after all, you sweetest of aunts," she cried, though at the same time bright tears were running out of her eyes. "I have to laugh, and yet, it is horribly serious—just think, Auntie, I must—"

She broke off suddenly and sprang up from her kneeling position, for in the open door, as if by magic, stood Ferra.

Ferra had, as I learned later, an enviable gift of never showing embarrassment; and, moreover, one could never see that she had any special aim in view in her actions, and so she came to-day, into Aunt Edith's room—with a genial smile which was very becoming to her delicate features—as if it were her custom to do so every day. She stretched out her hand, although she avoided looking into the questioning eyes of the old lady, threatened Charlotte roguishly with her finger, and nodded hastily to me.

"Ah, ha!" she said, "you seem to have found again your lost laugh with Aunt Edith, little one! I assure you, Aunt, that child goes around the house as if the hopes of her whole life had been blasted. Now I see how much your tears mean, you little fraud!"

Charlotte did not answer, but turned quickly to me, wiping away the last traces of her tears, and sat down beside me on the window-seat.

"Now, little cousin," she began, "we have not seen each other for a long time. Considering our avowed friendship, I have been expecting you would come over to inquire after me; but you have not."

"Could I dare do that?"

"Why, my child, what a foolish question! You simply go to my room, and if I am not there, send the housemaid after me, in case you didn't wish to seek me yourself."

I shook my head vigorously. "No, Charlotte, I would not do that; but you come here, that is nicer, and I will show you my place down in the cloister garden." Meanwhile, Ferra had pushed a chair up to Aunt Edith's window, and lay back comfortably in it. It was very evident she did not mean to leave the room before her sister.

It was also evident that Charlotte understood, for she bit her lip angrily.

"Now Auntie," asked Ferra, "what is your honest opinion of the whole story?"

"I have no opinion, my child, for I do not know the story."

Ferra's eyes suddenly brightened, and she threw a friendly glance at her sister.

"It is right of Lotta to settle this affair by herself," she said, in a tone of commendation. "It does not help matters to be asking advice here and there; it is only confusing."

"I was just about to tell Aunt Edith, Ferra, when you came in; but—although I am forced to delay giving her my confidence, I shall do so at some future time," she concluded.

"I will take a share in it then, Lottchen—if you will persist; I am sure, Aunt, you will allow me to do so. Do you not think, with us, that Lotta has no right to so obstinately resist when an honorable man makes her an offer of marriage?"

"I am not at all obstinate," corrected Charlotte, "for this 'honorable man' is very indifferent to me. Only it makes me unhappy, when you and mamma know that, you still urge me to marry him, as if—"

"You will never believe that we have only your good at heart, Lottchen," her sister said, softly.

"In this case, I surely can not see it," replied Charlotte, defiantly.

"Will you not take Gerhardt into your confidence?" asked Aunt Edith. "I can really say nothing about the matter; for, in the first place, I do not know anything about the gentleman, not even his name—for I do not go out, as you know, and haven't for long years; so, of

course, I know no one, and could not pass any judgment."

"No, Aunt, no,' cried Ferra, hastily, "Gerhardt must not be disturbed with such affairs; he is ill; we must never forget that, and he has, besides, many things on his mind already. And then, like all invalids, he takes an almost invisible speck for a black mountain. No, there is no necessity of telling him anything about the matter."

"Ah! now you are the old Ferra, looking on the dark side of everything; I do not consider Gerhardt an invalid by any means," said Aunt Edith, calmly.

"Gerhardt is a great sufferer, dear Aunt—excuse me. Continually with him as I am, I can better judge of his condition than one who rarely sees him. Pray observe him yourself, when he returns from his journey, and see how worn and ill he will look."

"Yes, I can believe that," remarked Charlotte, dryly, "such vexations as he will have to struggle with naturally would exhaust one. Joachim will have the pleasantest surprises for him *in petto*."

"You talk like a foolish child, Charlotte," said Ferra, rebukingly. "If Joachim makes debts, it is the natural consequence of Gerhardt's niggardliness. Why does he not give him a sufficient sum for his needs? I take Joachim's part, decidedly. I also know what it is to exist on a pittance."

"Poor Ferra," said Charlotte, good naturedly, "you are, to be sure, always kept unjustifiably *short*."

For a moment Ferra looked extremely angry.

"I do not claim to be economical," she continued, "nor do I claim that Joachim is. But that one can live decently on what Gerhardt considers sufficient is perfectly absurd. One must have forbearance for him,

because he is ill. How does a sick person know what life means?"

"That is true! It would be impossible for Gerhardt to squander his money right and left, to lose 2,000 thalers in one night, for instance. Does it take ability to do that? I hold it to be the contrary."

Charlotte tapped her forehead amiably with her finger and continued, rising, so that Ferra could not reply.

"And now, Aunt Edith, say to me one word—isn't it true that I have the right to give Herr von Sauden the mitten, if I do not wish to marry him? He inspires me with aversion. I am as afraid of him as I can be."

"Heavens, Ferra!" cried Aunt Edith, "would you have that child marry that old man?"

Charlotte began to laugh again; she clapped her hands together, and the musical voice rang out with a joyous tone as of one redeemed, it seemed to me. I had begun to feel very uncomfortable listening to the conversation between the sisters.

"Yes, is it not too ridiculous, best of Aunties?" she cried. "Can you not see him, so bent over, but always elegant in his toilet, and very active, with an irrepressible smile, his mouth puckered up as if he were just about to whistle, a rose in his button-hole, and a raven-black wig?— 'My dear young lady,'" she said, in another voice, hastily taking a duster from the wall, and making a most comical face, so that one saw she was mimicking her elderly wooer, "'permit me, with the greatest devotion, to lay at your feet some of my forest roses; they long after their beautiful sister;'" and thereupon she reached over to Ferra the feather-duster, with a grotesque bow. Although really angry, Ferra had to join in the general laugh.

"You are, and always will be, a child," she scolded,

and irritably threw the duster on the sofa with so much spirit that two of Auntie's favorites scampered off in a great fright.

"Shame on you, for making sport of so worthy a man; it is fortunate that mother does not see you."

"Oh, Ferra!" bantered the merry creature, "if I did not desire a much better fate for you, I would advise your taking him yourself, but—"

"Charlotte, you know I do not like any jesting on that subject. I shall never marry again. I have told you so a hundred times. I shall remain with Gerhardt."

"I am very sure Gerhardt will not require that sacrifice of you," said Aunt Edith, pleasantly. "Gerhardt is not in the least an egotist."

"That is just what I say, Auntie," assented Lotta; "and one of these fine days, Gerhardt will come and present to you a sweet little bride, and then—" She gave a saucy little titter, and turned abruptly around.

"Gerhardt is too sensible, thank God," rejoined Ferra, now thoroughly provoked. "He knows how ill he is, and will not make any woman unhappy; he is much too honorable for that."

"You take an entirely false view, Ferra," interposed Aunt Edith, letting her knitting rest for a moment. "As I said before, I do not regard him as ill, and even if he were, why should not an invalid find a loving companion? Gerhardt is made for a happy family life, and if a young girl loves him, and can say to his question: 'I love thee as thou art, and will be thine in sickness and need, as in joy and happiness,' why should you object, Ferra? And then, my child, you contradict yourself in your principles—you desire to bind your young sister to an old man who should be thinking, surely, much more of dying than of wooing; and yet you would deny any hap-

piness to Gerhardt, who, although not in robust health, is not ninety years old."

A smile played around Aunt's lips as she concluded; she did not look at any of us, but stroked her Minka.

"Am I not right?" she said, after a pause.

Ferra impatiently shrugged her shoulders.

"I felt that Lotta would be supported in her obstinacy here!" she said, sharply; "that is why I did not wish her to come. I think there is a great difference between Lotta and Gerhardt. He is heir to a rich estate, and Lotta has only her moderate—very moderate—fortune to live upon. She must marry if she wishes to continue to live as she has been accustomed. She can not wait for the Prince only existing in romantic stories; and the silly ideal that a young girl has of one all-absorbing passion—one only great love of a woman's heart—must be given up, for it is all nonsense; that is my opinion. In that I am sure you will agree, dear Aunt."

She was standing up, and the small hands, covered with many rings, moved restlessly as she talked. Aunt Edith had become suddenly quite pale.

"Stop, Ferra," she said, in a low, imperative voice; "that is enough! I have not forced my advice upon you; I was consulted. I am not afraid of Charlotte; she will know how to find her way alone. I beg you to consider the conversation as ended."

She got up and went into her sleeping-room.

"B-r-r!" said Ferra, as the door closed behind her, "I have done a fine thing now; but what did she want to make me angry for?"

Charlotte cast an astonished look at her sister, and then started to go to her Aunt; but before she could reach the door it was bolted from within with a loud snap.

"What were you saying, Ferra?" asked Charlotte.

"Nothing, more than that your Aunt has no right to pass judgment on such things, for in the matter of her own marriage, she conducted herself in such a stupid, brain-cracked manner that she compromised herself and her whole family! You need not know any more; if you should, you might find your reverence for her seriously wavering. Will you come and drive with me?"

Charlotte did not move. All the blood seemed to have left her face, only her eyes had a strange sparkle.

"I wish to know what Aunt Edith did," she said, quickly.

Ferra, who was indifferently examining the pictures over Aunt Edith's sewing-table, bent back the ivy leaves from a portrait that was carefully concealed under them.

"There he is," she said, mockingly; "but really it is not a proper subject for children," she added. "Aunt was forbidden to marry him, and she ran away from her parents' house in the night."

"That is not true, Ferra!" shrieked Lotta; "that is not true! Say no—please, please!"

She threw both arms around her sister's neck, and looked her passionately in the face.

"There, there, my treasure," said Ferra, soothingly, stroking her sister's blonde hair, "it is a fact. Gottlieb, the old sneak, was the one who helped her to escape. You know already to what unhappiness the fatal affair has led, for discord and dissension have dwelt in our house for many years. But release me; you are smothering me. Are you going to drive with me or not?"

"No, no," murmured Charlotte, withdrawing her arms.

"Then remain, you foolish thing!"

And without deigning to bestow a glance on me, she

left the room. A kitten clung to the long train of her thin summer dress, which she angrily shook off; then throwing a last glance at Lotta, in which scorn was mixed with anxiety, she vanished. Charlotte gazed after her with an almost expressionless face.

CHAPTER IV.

For a moment there was silence in the great room, then Charlotte stretched out her hands to me.

"Lena, come," she whispered, "show me your place in the cloister garden. I do not wish to see Aunt Edith now; I am too unhappy. Everything seems all wrong. It seems as if I had committed some evil act myself. Come, come."

She drew me hastily out through the dim corridor, and down the dust-covered stairs. Her arm was around my waist, and she held me firmly to her; and so we walked under the stone-arched passage, with the hanging vines, out into the fresh evening air of the garden. Purple-red lights fell through the high trees on our path, and flickered over Charlotte's beautiful face, that had so suddenly changed its expression. The grass had been freshly mown, and the air was sweet with its fragrance, and when we sat down under the linden, near the old grave-stone, Charlotte asked:

"Lena, do you believe what my sister related? I do not believe it, or there is another side to tell." Then she was silent, and looked thoughtfully out into the garden.

"I have loved her so, loved her like a mother," she continued, half aloud, and a delicate flush spread over her face at these words. "See, Lena, you can not think how much she is to me, and it can not pain you as it does me when Ferra—" She must have entirely for-

gotten that only a few days before she had lamented over the lack of a family scandal.

"No, do not tell me anything," she begged, as I opened my mouth to say to her that Gottlieb did really secretly drive Aunt Edith away one night, though for what reason I was ignorant. "You do not know her well enough; let us be quiet; I want to get into a better mood;" and so we sat, silent, buried in our thoughts.

Charlotte picked from a mallow stalk that grew near her one purple-red bloom after another, and braided them into a wreath, and I sat as still as a mouse, and mended, in imagination, George's little velvet jacket, and sewed on a beautiful little button; and, as I saw him smile with pleasure, my thoughts went to Cousin Gerhardt, and the idea came to me that I would ask him if my brother might not spend his autumn vacation with me in the old cloister. And then I saw us both rambling around together; I saw him sitting on one of Gottlieb's old horses, and tasting a thousand unknown and unexpected pleasures. And when I had finished painting this picture, and had vowed to myself, though with beating heart, to venture to make the request, I kneeled down on the old grave-stone, and looked dreamily between the trees out into the garden.

I scarcely noticed how Charlotte pulled and fussed over my hair, and then began to plunder the mallow stalk again. All sorts of romantic nonsense shot through my mind. I thought of Aunt Edith as a nun that a knight had loved, as in Christiana's stories, and how she went about sorrowful in the cloister garden, until one dark night he came for her, and they rode away to his castle.

Green are the woods and valleys,
The mountains high and bold,
My sweetheart is a hunter—
I love him thousand-fold,

sang Charlotte, in her soft and very sweet voice. I turned around to her; she had placed a mallow wreath on her head, and the sweet face looked almost glorified in its expression under the glow of the dark-red blooms. She had clasped her knees with the slender hands, and moved her lithe body with the rhythm of the simple melody.

Green are the woods and valleys,
The mountains high and bold,
My sweetheart is a hunter—
And I love him thousand-fold,

she sang again, but now loud, and almost defiantly; then she stepped past me, and walked slowly down the path, with bowed head.

I followed her with my eyes, but did not dare go after her. At last she vanished entirely in the thick shrubbery of the garden; only now and then her golden head would gleam for a moment through the green branches of the less dense foliage.

I sat alone now in my favorite little place; before me lay the garden, bathed in the rich, rosy glow of the setting sun. Even the gray walls and the columns of the cross-walk were roseate. No sound, no breath broke the deep quiet, the deathly stillness, and desertion that filled the place.

I settled myself back comfortably on the old gravestone and threw my arms around the trunk of a cypress tree; Charlotte would soon come back, and my thoughts busied themselves again with the moment when I should make my request to Cousin Gerhardt, to let George come here in his vacation.

In my mind, I mounted the stairs of the villa, and timidly entered his room.

"Dear Cousin," I said aloud, "I have such a great favor to ask of you. Please, please consent that George

may visit me in his vacation; I have such a longing for him, and I must also mend up all his things."

At this moment a dark shadow fell on my small personality; I threw my hands out, startled, for in front of me, right there under the linden, so tall that the leaves on its branches brushed his blonde hair, stood my Cousin Gerhardt, smiling down on me.

"Well, taking into consideration those last words, it is very evident the request must be granted," said he, in his deep, rich voice; "so in the autumn, Cousin, we shall see; but how can we get the little man here?"

I was covered with confusion. That I had been carrying on my imaginary conversation with my Cousin aloud, never entered my mind; but the joy that my dearest was really coming to me overcame every other thought, and I fairly shouted: "O, Cousin, dearest Cousin, you *really* will allow George to come?"

I seized his hand and hung onto his arm like a very child.

"O, that will be lovely, that will be a great joy, but—what will Aunt Edith say? Will she have him, and——"

"Certainly, certainly," he said, soothingly; "but now, do me a reciprocal service, Cousin; I am seeking Charlotte; she should be with Aunt Edith, but on going to her, I found all the doors locked. The maid said the young ladies were in the cloister garden, and true, in the most melancholy corner of the whole garden I find one; but where may the other be?"

"Here, Brother, here!" cried Charlotte; and in the next moment had her arms around his neck. "Say, quick, how are you? What brings you here? Is everything well?"

"Now Lottchen, on the one hand good, on the other hand—let us leave that. I have a thousand greetings for you from Robert, and you are to carry Aunt Edith

the news that he has been duly appointed chief forester in Fölkerode. I was not to tell her, and he would not write it; it was his wish that she should know of it from your lips."

Charlotte's beautiful face suddenly glowed as rosy as the rays of the setting sun, and her blue eyes glistened with joy. She raised herself on her tip-toes, pressed a kiss on her brother's blonde beard, and then ran as swift as a roe, over the grass-plat and path, and soon her figure vanished under the arch of the cross-walk. Gerhardt looked after her with a smile, and then turned to me, and sat down on the stone bench, evidently with the intention of giving his sister an undisturbed moment with her aunt. "Is this your favorite place?" he asked.

I assented.

"Would you not like the park better? It is much too melancholy here for such a young girl."

"No, I like it better here, because I never meet anyone here, and it is exactly as if this garden belonged entirely to me."

"So you have a propensity for solitude?" he said, banteringly. "Who keeps the little spot in such fine order—you, Cousin?"

I nodded, and looked up at him shyly, because I was afraid that he was laughing at me. But he was looking so thoughtfully at the gray sandstone figure under the ivy, that I felt he was thinking of something quite different from what he was speaking.

Quietly I took my place again on the old grave-stone, and so we sat motionless. Once I had the feeling that he was looking at me; and, when I turned my head, I saw his eyes resting upon me; then he hastily passed his hand over his face, and began to draw figures in the sand with a small stick.

"Now we will go, Cousin," he said, suddenly getting up. "Come, it will be late before I can obtain any rest; besides, I have not yet seen my mother, who is expecting me."

I got up and walked beside him down the dusky walk. He did not say anything, and we silently crossed the arched passage of the old cloister.

"Take care of the dark stairway, the steps are high," he said, warningly, as I hurried on before him. A fear had taken possession of me, a terror, in the weird old building, in this ghostly light. I felt as if an indescribable something lurked behind each stair pillar, and might at any moment seize me. I wanted to say to him, "Give me your hand?"

But that would have been too ridiculous. And then, as I went to spring up two steps at once, in my haste to catch up with him, as he was ahead of me, I felt a sharp pain in my left foot and sank on my knee.

"I was afraid of that," he said, turning around at my cry of pain, and hurrying down to me. "Does it hurt you much? Can you walk? No? Then I must carry you."

And like a feather he took me up, and carried me up the stairs.

"O, Cousin, and you are ill?" I laughed suddenly, half from embarrassment over the strange situation in which I found myself, and more from amusement over the evident falsity of that assertion.

"Who has said that?" he inquired, as we reached the upper hall.

"Only Ferra. But it is not true, is it?"

"No," he replied, simply. "I have been ill, but I think I am quite well now. Who has been adorning you this afternoon, little Cousin?" he said, after a short pause,

just as we had reached Aunt Edith's door; and in the dim light from the old-fashioned hanging lamp under the arched ceiling, I saw his blonde head bent down to me, and his eyes very close to mine.

"Adorned me?" I repeated, questioningly, and strove at the same time to get down from his arms, but in this I did not succeed.

"Charmingly adorned," he repeated, and dexterously opened the door to Auntie's sitting-room, and at the same moment Charlotte's joyous laughter met me.

"Have you a little fawn to sell, Gerhardt?" she called out, springing up from the sofa where she had been sitting beside Aunt Edith.

"I *will* get down!" I cried, almost weeping, for even Auntie laughed heartily.

But Gerhardt held me fast, and carried me straight to the long pier glass, and one look showed me a well known little brown face, that looked very unnatural under a fire-red wreath of flowers; indignant, I tore it from my head and threw it on the floor.

"O, fie, Charlotte!" I cried, angrily, and limped over to Auntie, who took me in her arms.

"And you did not notice when I put the wreath on your head?" laughed Charlotte. "O, you dreamy little piece of humanity."

"The little dreamer is a patient now," corrected Gerhardt. "She has hurt her foot. Shall I send the old shepherd to you, little Cousin?" he asked, smiling.

"Go away with your shepherd," declared Aunt Edith, "we can manage this alone, can we not, little one? But now, many thanks, dear Gerhardt, for the news you brought me; this is the first joyful day I have had for many long years."

She had taken Gerhardt's hand in hers as she spoke, and looked at him, deeply moved.

"You can not know," she continued, softly, "how happy it makes me to know he will be in Fölkerode—in Fölkerode. But now go; your mother will also be anxious to have news of Joachim. Nothing very serious has happened, Gerhardt?" she said, earnestly. His face darkened instantly.

"Yes, something very serious, Aunt, and which troubles me greatly," he answered, and shook in a firm grasp the hand of the old lady; then he took Charlotte's in his, and giving me an earnest, kind nod, he drew her out of the room. A short half hour after I lay, with carefully bandaged foot, on the sofa, and followed with my glance the neat, dainty figure of my aunt, as she walked restlessly to and fro. The fine face with the delicate flush, and the eyes with a light in them they had not known for years, had grown strangely youthful.

She went from the sleeping-room to the sitting-room; she opened the drawers in commode and press, and stood thoughtfully before them, as in a half dream, while I watched her aimless bustle. As for myself, I had the strange sensation of being no more the same person I was in the morning—as if I were grown up, and had become a reasonable, responsible, young woman, although, to be sure, I had behaved very childishly that evening. Whatever the feeling was, I could not explain it. I pressed Minka, who lay near me, to my heart and whispered to her: "Cousin Gerhardt has promised me that George shall come, and what a dear little boy he is."

Aunt Edith had no eyes for her pets to-day. She took Robert's picture from the wall, and sitting down in the easy-chair near me, held it in her folded hands and gazed tenderly upon it.

"See, Lena," she began, "in this picture he is only a child, and you will see what a dignified, stately fellow the new Herr Opperforester has become. Yes, yes, Lena; he has the same place his father once had; he will live again in the house where he was born, and where his mother lived the dearest years of her life. I can not tell you how happy it makes me. The dear God is just, child, and that which He has given me this evening compensates me for all I have suffered."

And as she pressed the picture tenderly against her cheek in proud mother-love, the bitter longing seized me for the true, true love that my George and I had lost forever.

In the meantime, Auntie had carried the picture away, and as she hung it in its place, there came a knock on the door, and old Gottlieb walked in.

"Good evening, Gnädige Frau," he said, remaining at the door, and began, in his peculiar suppressed voice, to give an account of the different commissions Aunt Edith had charged him with.

They mostly concerned sick people, and money distributions among the poor. He held a package of little books under his arm, and three or four medicine flasks in his hand.

"The doctor says old Frau Neumann must have a half-glass of wine every day," he finally concluded, "and I thought ——"

"Certainly, Gottlieb," interrupted Aunt Edith, "she shall have it. How is Mischen getting along in the city?"

The old man scratched his ear. "Well, Madam, not very well. Bah! always high-flown, fine dresses, new straw hat, like a great lady. Na, but I gave her a piece of my mind," he said, significantly, to himself, and raised his heavy white eyebrows.

"I can well believe that," laughed Aunt Edith. "You would not be very courteous to the poor thing, I fear; but spare her. She is still young, and she has inherited from her grandparents a good share of their stiff-necked honesty. Kind differs not from kind."

"H'm, so?" murmured the old man; "I don't count on it. Who knows? It is to be hoped so."

"Anything more, Gottlieb?" asked Aunt Edith.

"Nothing further, exactly, Madam," he answered, "only —you will not take it amiss that Lottchen—Fräulein Charlotte," he corrected himself hastily—"has told me that Herr Robert has been appointed high-forester in Fölkerode! Ah! Madam, I am not one of those who presume, because they have served long in a family, but to-day—I can truly say, nothing has given me so much pleasure for many a year."

"Give me your hand, Gottlieb, we are old friends," said Aunt Edith, and her slender white fingers were laid in the rough palm of the honest old hand. "My friendship has cost you much, Gottlieb."

"Do not speak of it, Frau Berka, do not speak of it." He turned away, and a pleased light spread over his rugged face. "If it was to do over again, I would do just as I did, even though I knew the consequences, because I was sorry for you."

"Yes, old Gottlieb, I have reason to think of it all to-day," nodded Auntie, and went to the table and poured out a glass of wine. "There, drink to my boy. I shall never forget that night all my life long."

"Neither shall I, Madam, neither shall I. What a storm! You could not see your hand before your eyes, and the wind blew such a gale that I thought horse and wagon and all would go down the mountain; and then the anxiety for fear that I should not get home again

before the household were on their legs. And as I thought everything was going so fine, and knew you were safe with the old grandmother, and was about to make my team comfortable, and put away the things, there the devil sent—to this day I don't know how—Frau von Demphoff out in the early morning. She came straight across the yard, in a big calico apron, as if she were going to the milk cellar—I must say, the Frau was always busy and active. My mouth dropped open when she called out to me: 'Where have you been so early, Gottlieb? How the horses look!' My! Whenever I think of it—"

"Yes, I know, Gottlieb; let us forget it." Aunt Edith walked up and down, much moved by his remembrances. The old man had come farther into the room.

"No offense meant, Madam," he said, deprecatingly; "but it came so fresh before my mind. I never felt worse in my whole life, except when my old wife died, as at that time when I had to go to my master's room and give an account of my night's journey. O, my goodness!"

Long after, my aunt kept up her restless pacing; even until the cloister clock had struck midnight, and I had been in my great canopy bed for two hours. I lay there awake; I could not sleep; my foot pained me some, and, moreover, my imagination ran riot; a thousand things chased one another through my brain; I asked myself a thousand questions I could not answer.

All my life till now passed before me in confused order, and everything seemed to group itself about Aunt Edith.

She was now in her sleeping-room; the door opening into mine was, as usual, open, and a broad stream of light fell on the checkered floor in my room; a shadow

passed in regular beat between the rooms, and the light step of the old lady sounded uninterruptedly.

There was something in this restless walking which excited me. At last I fell into a condition between sleeping and waking, and that moving figure was no longer that of my old aunt, but a young, blooming girl that was actively and secretly preparing to leave her father's house; but why? And then she appeared to me as she was now—pale, her hair silvered by many, many winters; and "Cats' aunt," I whispered, softly; "Cats' aunt."

Then the dear old face bent over my head: "Are you not asleep yet, Lena?"

I shook my head and threw my arms around her neck. "Auntie," I asked, "dear Auntie, why did Gottlieb drive you away so secretly that night, and why did you come back again and become 'Cats' aunt?'"

"Ah, child, you are much too young to hear such sorrowful stories. Sleep now, child," she commanded, and pressed a kiss on my forehead.

Then she went into her room, and soon extinguished the light.

But confused dreams hovered around my bed or stole under the faded silken curtains. Dark-red flowers were there, and Gerhardt's eyes looked so strangely down into mine; and then, between, I heard Charlotte's singing:

> "My sweetheart is a hunter,
> And I love him thousand-fold,"

and in the same moment I was entirely awake. Auntie's Robert was also a hunter! Like a flash, this fact illumined the chaos of my thoughts.

"O, dear Charlotte, now I know something!" I said, almost aloud; and soon I slept soundly until morning.

CHAPTER V.

Since that night weeks have passed, and they brought me only joy. George was here, and I saw with delight how his pale face grew brown and rosy in the health-giving country air. The beautiful boy had taken all hearts by storm. Even Ferra sometimes pressed his little brown face, with the dark Southern eyes, against her cheek, and called him her little page.

Charlotte, however, in her extremely amiable, yet mischievous way, accused Ferra of coquetry. Ferra knew very well that near the dark complexion of the boy her delicate, fair beauty was doubly enhanced. Ferra bore such little attacks with admirable gentleness; that is, she contented herself by calling Charlotte *enfant terrible*, and then lapsing into silence, well knowing that in a word contest with her young sister she would be badly worsted.

Charlotte had entirely recovered her good temper. Gerhardt had given a courteous but decided refusal to her old suitor, saying, "she was entirely too young," and the rejected lover had gone on a journey, of course with the assurance that he should not give up the hope of yet possessing the young lady.

But for the time being he was disposed of, and Charlotte troubled herself no more about this "spectre," as she named him. Ferra, however, seemed to share his hopes, for she always spoke of him with a certain familiarity, as if he already belonged to the family.

At such times it was most amusing to watch Lotta. She had a very successful manner of appearing not to hear anything of the conversation, that worked uncommonly well. Usually she sang softly to herself, and, exactly at the moment when Ferra was at the climax of her speech, she would interrupt her with such a far-fetched question or remark, that the artistically arranged dissertation of her sister fell as flat as a collapsed house of cards.

In that time I was often asked to the villa, almost always by Charlotte. Only once I saw Aunt Demphoff—when I went to present my little brother to her. I had some difficulty in getting him to come with me, for, in his child's logic, he did not think it necessary to say "how do you do" to the wicked aunt who hated his mother.

"You have no orders to give here, Lena," he insisted. "Everything belongs to Cousin Gerhardt. I will not go to her."

"You must, or you will displease our good cousin," I said; and then he passionately threw himself into the arms of Gerhardt, who would hardly let the boy go from him, so that I was almost jealous before I succeeded in carrying my point.

It was curious to see the two together—the tall, commanding-looking woman and the little boy. His brown face had become pale, his little hands, tightly clenched, were hidden behind him, and under their long lashes his eyes looked up with an inimitable mixture of contempt and childish curiosity.

"George has come to see you," I said, timidly.

The cold, impassive face did not change. It was the same room in which I had seen her first, and the same feeling of being gradually frozen possessed me.

She did not answer; the gaze that she gave to the little upturned face was very penetrating.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"George von Demphoff," he answered.

"How old are you?"

"Eight years."

Then she stepped to the bell, and ordered the servant who entered to bring lemonade and cakes into the next room, and to inform Fräulein Charlotte that we were there. She then invited us to go into the said adjoining room, and dismissed us with the remark that Charlotte would soon be down.

Nothing would have kept George another moment in her presence.

He rushed out of the door and vanished *sans façon* into Gerhardt's room, because our cousin had said he should drive with him into the fields.

Charlotte, who had come into the room, laughed heartily, and explained, when I expressed surprise at his knowledge of the place, that Gerhardt, the first day the boy had arrived, had brought him into the villa, and the little lad had been there nearly every day since.

"Mamma's refreshments seem to be quite disdained," she concluded. "She will be astonished; Joachim would have had every little crumb eaten by this time. Apropos, he is coming very soon with a half-dozen comrades to hunt; then you will have plenty of life in the old cloister, for they will all sleep there—there is no place here for them. And Ferra's nerves, O, heavens!"

But there was something to happen which was more interesting than the hunt; Aunt Edith was expecting her son. He was coming for the first time since this new dignity of high-forester had been bestowed upon him.

It was a delight to see the expression of quiet joy on Aunt Edith's face, as she went about making preparations for the coming of her darling. And she had no reproof for Charlotte, who, in celebration of this expected event, arranged scarlet neck-ribbons for all the cats, and hung a little bell to each one. The cats, while being arrayed in their decoration, kept up a frightful mewing and hissing, and afterward rushed pell-mell, in great fright, to their mistress. But old Gottlieb, who happened to be going through the room, muttered something, as we were indulging ourselves in great hilarity over the sight, and we heard him say to Aunt: "Frau Berka, it seems to me that we were not so silly and childish in our young days as young people are to-day. Now, just hear them!"

"Ah, Gottlieb, you have forgotten!" answered Aunt Edith. "You know the saying: 'A boy must be a fool seven years;' if he misses a single hour, he must begin all over again—from the beginning."

But the old man was not convinced.

"Nay, nay, everything is changed in the present day. In our days young people did not dare open their mouths except when their father sneezed, and then they would say 'God bless you.'" Whereupon Charlotte naturally sneezed very loud, and the old man, with unshaken earnestness, called out, "God bless you, Fräulein Charlotte," without seeing the joke.

Gerhardt came sometimes to Aunt Edith's. After the evening that I was so careless as to sprain my ankle, he would come to inquire how it was getting along. The red wreath that I had so angrily thrown away, however, and which I so gladly would have had back again, had disappeared, and Auntie, in her busy preparations for Robert, could not spend the time to hunt for it, but she

thought Jette must have swept it out, as she had never seen it since.

George's vacation was drawing to a close. He begged to be permitted to stay a few more days beyond the time set for his return, because, as he betrayed to me, Cousin Gerhardt would have a birthday; he was not to tell, however.

"Lena, what can we give him?" he asked me.

What could we? We must give something to Gerhardt, who had done so much for us, and had given us so many lovely days together. George was resplendent in a brand-new suit. The whole class would envy him, and the Frau Doctor and Christiana would clap their hands when they saw him.

We went to my room and counted over my little savings. I had 20 groschen, which I had hoarded like a miser, to buy George a Christmas present with, but that didn't matter. George must stand back, and the unselfish little boy was perfectly willing.

"But what can we buy, Lena?"

"Yes, what?" I thought and thought; finally a happy idea came to me.

"With this money we can buy some wool, George, and I will knit him a scarf—Cousin Ferra is always saying that his throat troubles him, and so it will be very welcome."

This proposal met with George's entire approval. The housekeeper purchased, secretly, the wool for me in the town, and in my favorite place, in the cloister garden, I knit with eager haste, a long, warm birthday present, while George's great brown eyes followed its growth with intense interest.

The little scene at the presentation of the gift is one of my dearest remembrances.

When I had finished it and was instructing George

with what words he should present it to Cousin Gerhardt, he crossed his arms on his back and declared, flatly, as he had not knit the shawl, and his money did not buy the wool, he had no right to give it to him. All coaxing, prayers, and entreaties did not shake him in his resolution, and so, if our cousin was to have his present, I must undertake the solemn act myself.

"Dear God, let it be very, very cold to-morrow," I prayed the evening before, so I could have the practical proof of the usefulness of my gift.

And, sure enough, there dawned such a windy, damp, raw September day that we shivered with cold in our cool rooms. George, as well as I, was delighted at the favorable circumstances, and he stood the entire morning at the window watching for Cousin Gerhardt, who had told him he should come himself to inspect the rooms for the guests.

As I sat meditating what I should say when I presented my scarf, George cried out, suddenly:

"He is coming! He is coming, Lena! and has no scarf."

The next moment I was out of the room and already down the corridor, on my arm the soft, warm present. I leaned over the balusters of the stairs, but when I saw him coming up, my heart began to beat so that I flew back from the lighted stairway, into a dark corner of the corridor. There I stood, with such a distressed look on my face that one would have supposed, that instead of having good wishes for him, I had bad tidings. He did not see me until he stood close before me, and his serious face suddenly brightened.

"Dear Cousin, I would—I wish to congratulate you on your birthday," I stammered, "and George and I—wish to give you this scarf—when it is windy and cold——"

"I thank you very, very much, little Cousin," he said,

heartily, and took both my hands; "this is an unexpected pleasure. But now you must wrap the scarf about me; it is just such weather as one needs to be bundled up."

He stooped away down to me, and too happy for words I wound the soft texture around his neck.

"O, how fine!" he said, "and a thousand thanks." And then he bent down again to me, and his eyes looked into mine with the same peculiar expression as at the time when he carried me up the stairs; but only an instant, for down the corridor on a full run came George, who hung, kissing and shouting, on his neck.

"Lena has deceived you," he cried; "she has given you the scarf all herself, with her money, and she knit it in the cloister garden!"

"Hush," I said, angrily, but Cousin Gerhardt took the little traitor up and kissed him, and then sat him on his shoulder; one end of the new scarf was used for reins, and they ran down the corridor till they reached Aunt Edith's door, as if on a wild hunt.

And then, of course, Aunt Edith must admire the scarf, and express the greatest surprise as to where and when I could have knit it, etc.

Before we went to bed that night, George said to me:

"Do you know, Lena, everybody was pleased with our scarf but Cousin Ferra."

"What do you mean, George?"

"Truly, I saw it; when Cousin Gerhardt went into his room, he was thinking, and he held the scarf close around him, and she asked him what common gray thing he had around his neck; but I told her right there that you had knit it, and that it was something very beautiful."

"And what did Gerhardt say?" I asked, with an unaccountably frightened feeling.

"I have forgotten that, Lena."

CHAPTER VI.

It was a gloomy, dark October day. The leaves of the trees hung wet and limp on the branches, and the walks through the park were covered with fallen leaves. It was the night before the great hunt. The guests were expected at any moment, and the stir and bustle sounded strangely in our usually so quiet house. In the corridors echoed the steps of the servants; doors were slammed, and the jar and clang vibrated along the high walls. Cousin Gerhardt and Ferra were inspecting the rooms for the last time, and one could hear Ferra's slow, distinct speech away off in Auntie's sitting-room. And here, too, were signs of festivity, for Aunt was expecting a dear guest this evening—her son. Gottlieb had fastened over the doors garlands of evergreen, and among the dark-green branches glowed crimson berries of the mountain ash. The solid old inlaid furniture shone like new, and Auntie went about in her quiet way through the rooms, giving a touch here and there, and commands to her busy workers. "Jette, be careful; do not knock that cup off with the hunting piece; it was my dear husband's favorite cup;" and, "Lena, you can gather some flowers in the cloister garden, to decorate the cake plate."

I laid my work away to go out, when Charlotte's slender figure appeared in the door. She held one hand behind her back, and when she came close to Aunt Edith, she presented her with a beautiful bunch of late roses.

"There, Aunt; never mind the cloister flowers," she said; "I nearly begged on my knees for these from the gardener, for Ferra had selected them and laid claim to them especially for herself. You must put them this evening at Robert's place at the table."

"Will you stay, Lottchen?" asked Auntie, delightedly, turning the bouquet round and round.

"Yes, as long as you will let me, for it is exceedingly uncomfortable yonder—differences of opinion between Ferra and Gerhardt on account of Joachim— B-r-r! it is frightful to me, and mamma is out of humor. May I remain until evening? I should like to, but"—she shrugged her shoulders dejectedly. "Is Robert coming in his own carriage?" she added.

"Certainly, dear. I shall have to see his turn-out, surely, and it is not a hard trip. I do not know what hour he will arrive; he only wrote this evening."

It was near the vesper hour, and Charlotte sat with us and ate daintily of the honey-bread and sipped her coffee. She "wasn't at all hungry." Then we tied the red ribbons around the cats' necks, but without the bells, and Charlotte advised Auntie to shut up the good little beasts when the shooting began, for a cat could hardly be distinguished from a hare.

Afterward I walked with Charlotte through the sleeping-rooms and admired the large canopy beds, the old-fashioned wash-stands, the glistening, fine, white linen, and the immense rooms that seemed even of greater dimensions in the half-light of the cloudy day. Almost the whole suite of rooms was in order, except those of the Abbess House, which were, as always, silent and deserted.

Charlotte had put her arm around me and become very quiet. She had been very merry, tra-la-ing and

singing bits of songs, but, as we came out of the last room and back again, through the long corridor, there were no longer songs or words on her lips, but in her eyes lay an expression of dreamy happiness.

"Sing some more," I begged, "sing again:

'My sweetheart is a hunter!'"

She started away from me, and gave me a keen glance.

"No," she said at last, "I do not wish to sing any more to-day."

When we entered Auntie's room we found her sitting at her writing-desk; the lid was raised, and she had pulled out a number of drawers and partitions, in which she had all sorts of things stowed away. The desk occupied a prominent place on one side of the chimney; on the other side was a flower-stand, full of fine, healthy plants; the sturdy India-rubber plant, with its thick leaf, and the graceful palm, which gave dignity to their more dainty mates.

As Auntie was sensitive to the cold, Gottlieb had kindled a bright wood fire, and the yellow flames mirrored themselves on the old inlaid floor and threw bright rays on Aunt Edith's gray dress. Charlotte curled herself up in a big easy-chair near her and gazed thoughtfully on the delicate hands so busy just now at the writing-desk, and I sat down on a low stool by the fire and gave myself up to the magic of the dreamy twilight hour.

Suddenly Auntie's hands were still, and as I looked up she held a dried, fine-leaved wreath in her hand.

"See here, children," she said, softly, "this was my bridal wreath."

I looked at the dried treasure with a mixture of awe and curiosity, and then at the little old lady. It seemed most strange and improbable that she could ever have been young, and worn a wreath of flowers. Charlotte,

also, bent over and looked with shining eyes on the dried token of a long-passed happiness.

"Ah, yes," began Aunt Edith with a tender voice. "When the wreath is fresh and green, people think that heaven with all its blessings has descended upon them. Even I thought so, children, and yet mine was such a sad wedding. I was an orphan, like you, Lena, but God keep you from such a sad experience. I made this wreath myself. I had not one friend, and the grandmother of my betrothed was my only attendant, and the only one in the church, except the pastor, when we stood before the altar. Tears were mingled with my prayers there, but as I went through the dewy, fresh woods, by my husband's side—we were married very early in the morning to avoid notice—ever farther into the deep forest, where lay the house which was to be my home; as the sunshine in the dew-drops sparkled on each tiny leaf; as the sweet, fresh odor of the woods breathed upon me, quite alone with the man whom I loved so much, to whom I was so dear; and as the blessed truth filled my heart that no one any more, save God alone, had the right to separate us, a holy joy possessed me, so sweet, so full, so pure, that no bride, with the most brilliant and splendid nuptials, could have experienced more.

"And if at any time I feel rebellious toward the dear Father, because He has laid upon me so heavy a cross, I recall my wedding-day, and the moment when I stood by his side, with his arm around me, just at the place where first one could see the gable of our house, that was almost hidden in the luxuriant beech woods.

"And I seem to see again his strong, young face, that looked away with glowing eyes, and hear his true-hearted, good voice as he spoke, 'there greets you, your home, Edith.'

"In that one hour was contained so much; all sorrow lay so far behind me, that it might never have been. I could conceive of no discord or dissension in the world. It was an hour of the purest, most unalloyed blessedness."

She still held the faded wreath in her hand, and the sweet remembrance of that morning tinted her cheeks with almost a youthful flush. Then she hastily laid it back in the box.

"Children, why do I speak of it all?" she said, and brushed her hand over her eyes. "What do you know of such things? There; look, isn't that pretty?"

And smiling, she held toward us a baby's shoe, all trodden down on the side.

"That was his first little shoe, Lena; how tiny, is it not?"

"O, give it to me a moment!" entreated Charlotte, softly, and as the little shoe lay in her hand she stroked and caressed it, nearly the same as Auntie, only in shy haste, as if she were ashamed.

"Heavens!" interrupted the old lady, "how the time flies, and in my reminiscences I have almost forgotten what I was after here. There; see, children, that is to be Robert's to-day," she said, and held up a hunting-knife, with richly-gilded handle; "it belonged to his father, and he shall carry it now."

Then she began to put back in their places the little trifles and remembrances, while Lotta examined the knife; finally she laid it on her lap, and when Auntie asked for the little shoe, she gave it back lingeringly.

"No, no, Lotta dear, you can not have that," she said, laughing. "You must leave me something."

Charlotte was crimson, and turned her face hurriedly away. It was still in the room, and dusky; the fire had gradually burned out.

"Now, tell me something, children," said Aunt Edith, settling herself comfortably in the easy-chair Charlotte had given up to her; "it will make the time pass more quickly."

"Ah, no, Auntie dear," begged Lotta, "you shall tell us something, and do you know what?" She had kneeled down and taken Aunt Edith's hand in hers. "Tell us why you left here secretly at that time? You can not think how I long to know."

"Ah, dear child, the story is almost too sad for two young things like yourselves."

"Please, Auntie dear, O, please," coaxed Lotta. "Was it not true that they were unkind to you; that they would not let you marry your betrothed?"

"Yes, that was it," said Aunt Edith, "and God knows I did not make my resolution lightly; it was no easy thing, but I could not do otherwise. With all my heart and soul I clung to him whom I was ordered to forget at any cost. If I had only known why; there was no charge made against him. Good and upright; a nobler man could not well be, and from infancy well-known; and a frequent guest at our house—my brother counted him his dearest friend. That we loved each other, your father had known for a long time, Charlotte, and my dear mother whispered to me on her death-bed, her almost dying words: 'If it should come that Herr Berka wishes to make you his wife, Edith, do not say no. He is as true as steel, and of a noble nature.' Soon after that your father married, child, and from that time on a persistent opposition to our love was begun; not openly, but that was a thousand times worse. Sometimes a fortnight would pass that I did not see my lover, although he came to Fölkerode many times during the week; almost always it happened

when I was driving with my sister-in-law, or out with her somewhere, and if he found me at home it would be made impossible for us to speak more than a few words to one another.

"He was not one of those, however, that willingly fight with closed visor. One day after—I regret to say it—a letter from him, that he had sent me by a messenger, failed to reach my hands, and he could not longer endure such interference, he rode over to Fölkerode, and went straight to my brother's room. I was sitting with my sister-in-law, who had Gerhardt on her lap. Your mother has never been a woman of many words, Charlotte, but that day she made a long speech to me, the substance of it being that Herr Berka was a hot-tempered, violent man, and not calculated to make any woman happy. I did not answer, but bit my lips till they bled, to keep from crying. Soon I heard through the closed door loud conversation, and recognized my lover's angry voice. The next moment I stood between the excited men, and declared I was Herr Berka's betrothed, and should so remain.

"'We will see,' said your father.

"'Yes, we will see,' I repeated, and with that began our hostility. All day, I would remain locked in my room, unceasingly racking my brain, what now to do. I had prevailed upon Berka, that day, not without the most earnest opposition, to stay away from Wendhusen, giving him the assurance that I would remain true to him. I never thought of flight, although a thousand plans had gone through my head. Then I did the simplest, most natural thing; I went to your mother, I placed before her how long and how truly we had loved each other, and entreated her to abandon her anger against us, and use her influence to soften her husband's will; she had

only to put herself in my place, and think it was her love that was so hindered and thwarted. 'Never!' she cried, with passion, and in a tone that left no doubt in my mind that I had nothing to hope for from her.

"'Very well,' I answered, 'then I must see what I can do for myself,' and went to my room. I began immediately to put my things in order. What I should do was not clear in my mind, only to get away, away at any cost. Then I slipped down into the servant's room, motioned to Gottlieb, at that time an active, strong man, and ordered him to be at the two beeches with the light wagon. Off to one side from Fölkerode lay a small town, where Berka's aged grandmother, a widow, lived. She was almost childish, and I knew her only from his description, and that her home had taken the place of his father's house to him, as his parents died in his childhood; and so, in the night and fog, Gottlieb drove me to her; secretly, as a thief, I left my father's house. My resolution almost failed me, as I stole down the steps, and in spite of the unhappy situation I nearly turned back, because of the almost overpowering misery and sorrow I felt. It seemed to me as if I had left indelible disgrace behind, as if I had laid something that was worse than a curse on the honorable standing of my home.

"But I hesitated only a moment, and as the horse went on, and the outline of the old cloister vanished from my sight at the next turn in the road, I wept, and sobbed, and prayed, as one in despair.

"The old lady was not a little astonished to have, in the middle of the night, the betrothed of her grandson ask for shelter; but although she could not clearly comprehend what it all meant, she was kind, and took me in and cared for me.

"The next morning I sent a letter to my brother, telling him I should not return again to his house, and at the same time wrote to my betrothed, telling him where I was and what I had done. My brother did not reply to my letter, but sent me the necessary papers. From another source I learned that a storm of passion made the rafters ring in the old rooms at Wendhusen, and that the fugitive was to be cut off from any further recognition as sister. Ah, children, you do not know how hard it was for me at that time, and yet the first years of my married life were the happiest I have known. But finally fate rushed upon us, like a storm through the forest. First my husband had the misfortune to be obliged to shoot down a poacher. Week after week we would find threatening notes or letters thrown into the house declaring revenge. It was a terribly anxious time, that year of 1848.

"One evening I sat with my husband in the sitting-room. He had just returned from the forest, and we were playing with Robert, when suddenly there was a report, and a ball whizzed close over his head and shivered a mirror, hanging opposite, into a thousand fragments.

"Every day I parted from him with a deadly fear at my heart, and would go about the house restless and tortured with anxiety till I finally heard again his dear footsteps, and could throw my arms about him who was my all. Children, in such times one learns to pray. You do not know how, in such moments, when the heart is torn with love's fears, an earnest prayer strengthens the soul and helps one through so many unspeakably fearful hours.

"But 'God wills, whoever directs,' says an old proverb, and so there came that terrible day when I was

never to hear his step again, when they carried him into his house dead and cold."

Aunt was silent, as if exhausted by emotion.

My eyes were wet, and I involuntarily reached out for Charlotte's hand, but her chair was empty, and in feeling around I touched her soft hair. She was kneeling before Aunt Edith's chair, and soft sobs came to my ears.

"Do not weep, dear," said Auntie, gently. "I said the story was too sad for such young folks who as yet had lived without sorrow. Heaven guard you from such agony as I passed through! Truly you, little Lena, you know already what it is to stand by a coffin and not be able to realize that in that narrow, awful room rests a beloved face that we shall never see smile again, and nevermore hear words from the cold lips; that which was our entire, greatest happiness, is lost, forever lost.

"And now, after they buried him, I had to live my life and meet all its imperative demands. I must care for my child, and these cares were pressing hard. My extremely small pension was not enough for our daily needs, to say nothing of Robert's education. My husband, when we were married, had written my brother in proud self-reliance that he would renounce the dowry of his wife. In a certain length of time I must vacate the forest-house, and knew not where to go or of whom to ask counsel.

"About four days before I was to leave the dear old house a fire broke out in the night—I never shall forget that night! I was awakened by a shriek so dreadful, so blood-curdling, that I sprang to my feet. When I think of that shriek I feel again as if an icy-coldness was rushing through my veins. At the same moment there

was a blow on my window-shutter, and the voice of a huntsman cried, 'Fire! Fire!' and as I raised the blind a fiery glow burst into the room. The barn was in full blaze.

"I do not really know what I did then; to snatch Robert from the bed and to get him into his clothes was the first thing. Then I mechanically searched around for little things that I could take with me. When I discovered later what I had saved I had to smile, and yet I could not have taken away anything dearer. It was the box with my bridal wreath, the baby shoe, and that hunting-knife, also a couple of silver spoons and some linen.

"And when I stood under the dark trees with my child, a little bundle in my hand, and stared into the fiery glow as if spell-bound, everything seemed to me a wild, weird dream.

"I remember that a multitude of people from the surrounding hamlets stood around, but they moved neither hand nor foot to save anything. It was 1848. They tried to throw one of the foresters in the fire. I heard the bellowing of the drunken crowd; saw how they struggled with him. They threw out of the windows of the house what was inside, piece by piece of my simple furniture, to which clung sweetest remembrances; flung them out to be carried away or demolished by the horde. It was a horrible, desolate scene, lighted by the red flames, that now had seized the grand old oaks that surrounded the house, but they succeeded in saving the dear old house itself.

"Robert clung to me in fright, and old Diana, my husband's favorite, a splendid spaniel, stood near me uttering low growls. Then I heard my name called, as by a thousand throats. I had felt that they would seek me.

My danger and my boy's put life into me. I picked up the child and fled. How far I went before I sank down exhausted I can not tell; it was on the edge of a highway, and just then a wagon came along; I called out, and when it stopped I recognized the pastor of a neighboring town. The old gentleman started when he saw me. 'The high-forester's house is on fire,' I gasped, summoning all my strength to get into the wagon with Robert. 'Cursed rascals,' he murmured, then he asked where he should take me?

"'To Wendhusen,' I said, mechanically, already burning with fever. I thought when all else failed there was still my father's house, and in that moment of agitation I had forgotten everything which had separated me from it. It was nearly midnight when we got here, and the bell at the gate sounded in my ears like a funeral knell. Then lights passed quickly here and there, the great door of the Abbess House opened, and my brother, who in those troublous times was prepared at any moment for alarming news, came out upon the steps, followed by one of the servants. I supported myself by one of the iron knobs of the balusters and looked in his eyes; he started when he recognized me; for a moment a severe expression passed over his face, then came the old look of goodness and benignity which was his true nature.

"'Give me a shelter, Werner, me and my child,' I entreated, but in a set way, like something memorized, for I seemed no longer to have power to think, and my tongue failed me. 'They have burned the house over my head, and I am ill.' He caught me in his arms as I fell, and carried me into the house, and then I sank into unconsciousness.

"I had a long, severe illness. I have absolutely no remembrance of it, but as I returned to health I remem-

ber some days; the first day I sat up in the bed, for instance—it was in that sleeping-room there—the memory came back of all that had befallen me, in all its horrible details. Gottlieb's wife nursed me, and from her I learned how near death I had been.

"It was a sad awakening, and at first I wished so often that I had died at that time. My relations with your parents remained forced; yes, hostile, although I tried to propitiate them, and did not shrink from humiliating myself. They took Robert from me, however; he was to be brought up with Gerhardt and Joachim. This dwelling was given to me for my use, and one day my brother came to me, the first time in many years, to say that he would pay me interest on the capital, once disdained by my husband, but I must promise, however, not to interfere in any way with the education of my child.

"What could I do? I had no choice! I dared not go out of the house, that at least was a roof over my head, with my boy, for I was not able to support us. I was still an invalid, and it was no wonder.

"So I lived here, a life gloomy and solitary, deprived of my one ray of sunshine, my only joy, for my child was likely to be entirely alienated from me.

"When I heard the merry shouts of children's voices, that came up from the corridor below, my heart would throb in expectation and feverish agitation; but how many times I waited in vain. Days at a time I never saw him, and when, sometimes, I heard outside in the hall hesitating steps that I recognized, and I would run, trembling for joy, through the rooms to open the door, there would stand my little son, shy, and almost defiant before me, and would submit to my caresses with evident resistance. He was no more my bright, loving boy that once hung on my neck with such impetuous tenderness.

"'Robert!' I would entreat, almost on my knees before the child, 'do you not love your mother any more? Have you forgotten how beautiful it was when we went into the woods to meet papa in the evening, and we saw the deer, and I braided you a wreath for your little hat? Tell me, do you never think any more of that?' Sometimes he would nod his head, and for a moment his face would light up, and the stubborn look would disappear; but usually he would answer: 'But then, it is much better here.'

"I would beg him to come again very soon. I began to talk to him about his father, to tell him how good and noble he was. He would scarcely listen to what I said; but would go skipping about from one place to another, impatient to get away. 'But Robert,' I would cry, almost in despair, 'have you no pity for mamma, that she must always be here alone?' Then he would look at me with a childish, indifferent expression in his eyes, and shake defiantly his curly head, and if I wept he would run away, and would not come again, until, for longing and grief, I was nearly desperate, and would send Gottlieb for him, who would succeed, by all arts and promises, in decoying the boy to me. What did I not live through in those days in my anxiety over the development of the character of my child, powerless as I was to help him! I heard him complained of as a quarrelsome, overbearing boy, and Joachim's shrieks showed me often enough that they were constantly fighting. One day I heard, in the vestibule of the Abbess House, Joachim's loud screams of passion and Robert's angry retort: 'You detestable cub, I will give it to you.'

"At first I sat still; then, as the tumult grew louder, I laid down my work and ran along the corridor. At the

foot of the stairs lay both boys in a fierce struggle, and the setter belonging to Gerhardt near them howling dismally, with one of its forepaws in the air. Robert was on top of the roaring Joachim, and with fists and feet was beating him soundly. I drew the little murderer back. He turned round to me, his face red with heat and anger.

"'He was tormenting the dog!' he cried, choking with indignation. 'I must punish him, the black sneak!'

"It was impossible to hold him. Just then, your mother, Charlotte, stepped out of the library, and we stood facing each other for the first and last time since my flight—not even by your father's coffin did we reach out our hands. We stared at each other in terror; the few years had made serious ravages in her once blooming face, and she hardly recognized me. The fresh young girl she knew had become a grief-stricken, rebellious woman; my mirror told me that every day. So we stood in the vestibule, and between us struggled the children in silent rage.

"Then your mother aroused herself from the dazed condition into which my unexpected presence had thrown her, and suddenly pulled my boy to his feet and raised her hand to strike him. He looked up at her defiantly; she pushed him back and shook her own flesh and blood violently, all without a sound, and with tightly-closed lips. I took hold of my own child and drew him to me to reprove him, when he tore himself from me, and throwing his arms around your mother, buried his head in her dress.

"There I stood, deserted and helpless! A smile appeared on the face of my sister-in-law that cut me to the heart. It was not malicious—oh, no; it was a happy, an almost heavenly smile, that made her cold face

strangely beautiful. I turned and went back to my room, and there I lay more wretched than ever before. I believed I had lost the love of my child forever; and so I lived for years having no joy in anything, and no hope. The children grew up; you were born; Gerhardt and Robert were sent to the Gymnasium at B—. Only rarely came news from them; Robert was in the Cadet Corps. They spent their vacations here, and then their old hatred would break out anew. It was in those days I received the name of 'Cats' aunt.' You asked me once, Lena, why I was called so. On one of the anniversaries of my husband's death, the full consciousness of my blighted life came to me, and, overwhelmed and full of despair, I went out and sat down on the margin of the forest, and asked uncounted times why the Lord had sent to me so much pain. In my misery doubts of God's goodness and justice assailed me. I even questioned the existence of a God. I had become wicked. I was afraid of myself, and seemed to have lost the power to think differently or better. My mind seemed paralyzed. I only felt my pain, my desolation, and then—it seems ridiculous now—and yet I thanked the dear God so heartily. As I sat there, looking into the green branches with burning eyes, and thought of the man that death had robbed me of, and the passionately-loved child that life had taken, and how utterly alone I was in the wide, wide world—something pulled on my dress and crawled up, and as I looked down, startled from my reverie, there on my lap was a little, white, half-starved kitten, looking at me beseechingly with its sharp little eyes, and mewing mournfully; then it began to play with the fringe of my shawl, so contented and amusing, that I forgot for a moment, in watching it, my trouble. I took it in my hands and stroked it, and a real childish

joy, which I can not describe, came over me as I played with the little creature.

"I almost smothered it in my fondness, and that it was not afraid of me, did not run from me, stirred me deeply. Truly, when I came back to the house with it, satisfied with my play, and it sat in the window and daintily licked its paws, it swept over me how poor I was that a dumb brute was able to give me so much pleasure, and the bitter tears filled my eyes, and yet, the confiding little creature was as dear as a friend. All the rest are her descendants; isn't that true, Minka? O, really, we understand one another," she said, caressing the cat that had been sitting on the arm of her chair for a long time.

"There is an end to everything in this world, children," she continued, then, as Charlotte still wept, and I resolved to treat the cats better than ever before, "and there was to that frightful time. I found my boy again; he became my child once more, body and soul. God be praised, Who heard my passionate entreaties! The past lies far, far behind us, and to-night I would exchange with no king in the world."

"Is it not true, dear Aunt," asked Charlotte, softly, "that time that Robert was so very ill with typhoid fever, that——"

"Yes; then he learned to know his mother, dear, but he was not given up to me without a contest, for your mother insisted upon nursing him. They had brought him into a room there, across the corridor, and if the old family physician had not interposed his authority—— but we will leave that. The day when he first again said, 'Mother, dear mother,' and to-day, are blessed days."

Charlotte's soft weeping had grown mute.

"Mamma wanted to care for him?" she asked, incredulously. "O, dear Auntie, you must be mistaken; she lways has had such fear of contagious diseases."

"I am not," said Aunt Edith, decidedly.

"But I do not understand," said Charlotte, almost impatiently; "you said a while ago that she did not strike him at that time, and now, that she wanted to nurse him, and I know positively that mamma does not like——"

"Now you have your little head full of doubts," interrupted Aunt Edith; "you know that your mother treats Robert coldly, almost rudely; that she scarcely takes any notice of him; yes, still more, that she is not at all willing to have him here, and yet, I tell you, she insisted upon taking care of him in his illness; it seems very contradictory? Yes, but never mind, Charlotte, and do not think of it any more; it would be no use, for it is an enigma. How strange is a woman's heart! Who can fathom it?"

Charlotte was silent; it was very still in the room; the clock ticked monotonously, and in the fire-place glowed the ashes of the last coals. They glowed like fiery eyes and threw out a soft light in a small circle, and in this glimmer I saw Charlotte's head suddenly raised up from Aunt Edith's lap, and she turned to the window as she rose to her feet, as if listening; then she bent down to Aunt, I heard a kiss, and a loving "good-night," and the next moment the room door closed behind her.

"Charlotte! Charlotte!" Auntie called after her; but she was already beyond call. "What is that whimsical child going to do now?" she said, softly. Again it was still, and I saw in my mind again all that picture that Auntie had made so clear with only a few strokes.

"Poor, poor Auntie!" I thought, while mechanically

my hands laid brush-wood on the few live coals. Then I snuggled up to Auntie's knee. Her fingers threaded lightly through my hair, and stroked over my face; I held them fast and tried to kiss them. The door flew open and a fresh, buoyant man's voice sounded in the room.

"Good evening, my good, my dear little mother!" In a moment I was on my feet, and someone else knelt in my place, someone whom I had never seen.

"Robert! Robert! you have come already?" she cried; "my boy, my fair-haired laddie!"

I shyly drew back not to intrude upon the meeting between mother and son. The dry brush-wood blazed up clear and bright, and the playing flames showed me a large, very handsome man, with dark, curly hair, whose eyes, beaming with joy, rested on Auntie's face. He had raised her up, and now held her in his arms. I had remained standing in the middle of the room, and my glance rested in fascination on his splendid physique. Then—there on the top button of his green hunting-jacket, hung by a single little thread, was a knot of pale-blue ribbon, which surely did not belong there, and this knot—yes, only a short time ago, I saw it in Charlotte's hair—or was I bewitched?

Quietly I slipped away, all the time puzzling over what I had seen by the flickering flames. Then it seemed as if someone softly sang:

"My sweetheart is a hunter,
That I love a thousand fold."

"O Lena, you foolish thing!" I whispered, half aloud, "what do you know of love?"

I pressed my hands before my eyes. It was as if a veil, the existence of which until now I had had no suspicion, lifted a wee bit, and I had seen into something

wonderful, heavenly; as if the air was flooded with the scent of roses, that I imagined I really inhaled. I know not why it was, but suddenly burning tears started from my eyes, and a hitherto unknown, passionate feeling of envy filled me. O happy Charlotte!

During the evening, as I sat by the table with Auntie and my new cousin, and his pleasant, cheery words sounded in my ear (we had instantly become friends), my eyes furtively glanced to the upper button of his coat, but the place was empty. And when Aunt began to talk of Charlotte, and regretted that he had not come a few moments earlier, because then he would have met her, a flush mounted to his temples, and he was silent.

O Cousin Robert,if you had known what I had noticed!

"Mother," questioned Robert, suddenly, and he laid his sun-browned, shapely hand on his mother's, which looked like a child's in comparison, "does Joachim live at the villa or here?"

"Here, so far as I know," replied his mother, and looked at her son with rather an anxious expression on her face.

"I wish he would remain there," he said, frowning deeply.

"Robert!" she entreated, fervently, "you will not——"

"I shall keep out of his way, Mother, I shall have nothing at all to do with him. I pity Gerhardt. The young lord sits this time so deep in the mire, I think they can scarcely pull him out, in spite of Ferra's desperate attempts to marry him off. The handsome Joachim is a poor apology for a man."

"Poor Gerhardt," sighed Aunt Edith.

Robert shrugged his shoulders.

"If it were not for Aunt Theresa and Ferra he would long ago have gone to the dogs. But let us leave him;

he is not a profitable subject of conversation. When are you coming to visit me, Mother?" and he looked affectionately into the eyes of the old lady. "Fölkerode desires to greet you; the old place wants to see you once more."

CHAPTER VII.

There was not much sleep for anyone that night; there was such a tumult in the old house, that one might have thought all the hunters from the Hartz Mountains had come over, and were storming through the echoing corridors. Doors were slammed, commands given, and such loud conversation carried on, one would almost think it was a matter of life and death under discussion.

Servants hurried here and there; luggage was dragged about; and above all other noises sounded, dictatorial and loud, a somewhat hoarse man's voice. I also recognized Gerhardt's orders. I knew well the deep, rich tones.

Exclamations as:

"Famous estate!" "Enormous trees!" "By Jove, a capital beast! Down!" "What do you say to scat?" denoted that Joachim and his guests had taken possession.

Even after the gentlemen had left the corridor and gone to their rooms, we could plainly hear them talking and laughing.

Aunt Edith and Robert sat together on the sofa in the sitting-room; I had retired early to my room; I knew they must have so much to talk about, they two alone.

It was quite late when I heard her go to bed.

For two hours or more, confused dreams, from which I would awake with a start, kept sleep at bay.

In my dreams I saw a little being, in bridal veil, steal down the long, dusky corridor; she wore a wreath of

deep-red mallow blossoms, that showed from under the veil, and Auntie's cats, two by two, for attendants walked behind her. There below, on the stairs, stood Aunt Theresa, with a strange smile on her strong features.

"There comes Robert with Charlotte," she said, and as I turned around to see them I awoke.

I got up the next morning with a dizzy head, from my restless night. Aunt Edith's face, however, beamed with happiness.

"They were off long ago. Did you not hear, Lena, when the noisy crowd departed? Heavens, what a bedlam! I have not closed my eyes all night."

Then came Charlotte, and as she stood in the high old room, in her simple dark-green woolen dress, that clung in soft folds to her slender figure, the beautiful golden hair, in heavy braids, coiled high on her head, and ornamented with a deep-red rose, she seemed as I had never seen her before, much, much more charming; a sweet, tender, happy expression had taken the place of the usual look of arrogant sauciness, and endowed her with a most charming womanliness.

Dreamily she looked before her, and now and then a roguish smile would steal around the sweet mouth, especially when her glance fell on Robert's picture hanging over the sewing-table.

"They will be back at 3 o'clock, dinner is to be served at half-past; let us see, what time is it now?" she said, hastily, interrupting Auntie's regrets that she had not stayed a little longer, as Robert had arrived only a few moments after she left.

"Do you know I laid awake nearly half the night?" she continued. "Your story took such a hold of me that sleep was not to be thought of. You dear, sweet little Auntie, how you must have suffered; but now it is

all past; now the beautiful days have come, and wonderfully beautiful all the rest of your days shall be.

"Yes, dear, if the good God wills," replied Aunt Edith, who had a hunting-jacket of her son's on her lap, and was sewing on a button.

"He will permit it, Auntie," nodded Charlotte, assuringly, an unshaken confidence in her charming face. Then she moved quickly about the room, and the little nose was evidently scenting something. "Ah, ha! no mistaking it," she said. "Tobacco smoke has been here. So he has already contracted that habit? but I will"——She broke off, suddenly, and turned her blushing face away. "I suppose a hunter is obliged to smoke," she said, as if making excuses for him. "What do you think, Lena?" she asked, still with her face turned away. "Shall we not go into the cloister garden? It is an age since I was with your old Frau Abbess, and Aunt has so much here to do that—"

"Yes, go, children, if you want to. How is it, Lottchen, do you eat with the gentlemen?"

"No; mamma complains of a headache and Ferra has her stereotyped megrim. In truth, it is all very disagreeable on account of Joachim, and ill temper runs high—b-r-r!" with a little shudder. "I wonder that all the walls in the villa do not tumble about our heads. Even the youngster screams incessantly, to-day, and is so wayward no one can do anything with him. Gerhardt looks dreadfully worried. Joachim, on the contrary——. Do you remember what papa used to say, Auntie, dear! 'A hundred hours of worry pay not a farthing's worth of debts.' This proverb Joachim seems to have made his own, for in spite of his disgrace, for it amounts to that, he is as gay as a lark. Come, Lena, I will not think of it again to-day," she added.

We went out the next moment, along the corridor and down the stairs, and into the cloister garden that seemed doubly cheerless and deserted under the gray autumn sky, with the shrubs half-shorn of their foliage and the unraked paths, on which the dry leaves lay—who knows how thick.

A fine mist lay on the highest tops of the trees, the air was oppressively heavy, and from a distance now and then came the report of a gun.

Charlotte walked restlessly up and down in the garden. She did not seek the old grave, but seemed deep in thought.

"It might be so beautiful in the world if it were not for the *ifs* and *buts*," she said, half aloud. "There is always something that, spectre-like, stands behind us and says: 'Be happy, but not too happy, for I am here.'"

Then she looked again at her watch, and finally sat down on a little bench, drew me down beside her, and was very still.

"Stay with me, Lena," she begged, as I got up once to pick some asters that were blooming between some high nettles and really seemed to be pleading to be released. "Pray do not leave me; I must have someone near me to-day; I am afraid of myself."

I sat down obediently and wrapped my shawl about me, for it was chilly.

Finally Charlotte sprang up with a bound, her face brightened, and she began to sing softly as she walked.

"How silly one is to fret about what *might* happen," she said, breaking off from her singing. "Come here, sweetheart, you shall have a kiss for keeping me company," she said, gayly, and carried out her promise.

In the dark cross-walk she stopped suddenly still;

then she flew rapidly up the steps and leaned, breathing heavily, against the newel of the balusters. I saw how pale she had become, and that she was trembling in every limb.

Then a man's voice came to us, quiet and earnest, as a father speaks to his child. Our glances followed the direction of the sound till they rested on a partly-open door, one of the dark, heavy, always-locked doors of the Abbess House.

"Gerhardt," whispered Charlotte; "they are in the library."

"And if you make me a thousand promises of improvement, if you even give me your word of honor, I have no longer any faith in you. You have destroyed my confidence. In my eyes you no longer possess the right to speak of your honor, for you have lost it. Since you—yet we will not speak of that further."

Charlotte had crouched down on the stairs and her face was deathly white; her eyes were closed as if a frightful blow threatened her, which she could no longer ward off.

My breath seemed to choke me. I cowered against the balusters, shaking with fear of I knew not what. I felt something dreadful must come after those words.

But everything was still—one could have heard a feather fall.

"In spite of all that," began Gerhardt again, "I will do what is possible to give you at least the appearance of honor in the eyes of the world—not on your own account, no, I have no sympathy for you, but for the sake of the good old name that our father left to us. It is well that he is spared the knowledge of what has happened through the fault of his son. I will commit the mad act of paying 13,000 thalers of your so-called

debts of honor, and in so doing am wronging the rest of us. When I learned yesterday in what manner you have been able to extend your credit, I felt like putting a bullet through my head, although that is what you should have wished to do to yourself. I have asked myself again and again how it was possible for you to do this thing, to yourself and to me, and I find no answer. I will take good care that no one besides ourselves shall know of this affair; the interests of the family demand it. One thing more: You have, up to the present time, used up a fortune of 20,000 thalers, and besides, I have, during your short career as officer, paid at least 10,000 thalers' worth of debts for you. Now, this is the last, for I can not ruin myself for you. Ferra, also, possesses almost nothing of her former fortune, and the demands her luxurious habits make, besides the education of her son, fall upon my shoulders. I shall be obliged to retrench in every way; consequently, this money is the last you will receive from me, so govern yourself accordingly. That is now all that I have to say to you. I think, moreover, you know how we stand; we are—"

"For God's sake, come," whispered Charlotte, getting up, and going hastily down the steps.

I would have followed her, but my strength failed me from fear, for I heard a spur-ringing step, and a young man came out and approached me, fortunately without seeing me. It was a slender, elegant figure, in the stylish hunting costume of the present day. He slashed about with a small riding-whip, and his handsome face, which strongly resembled Ferra's, wore an expression of sullen anger.

He muttered an oath, remained standing a few moments at the foot of the stairs leading to the upper

corridor, thoughtfully twisting the ends of his well-kept mustache, then began to whistle softly and went on.

As soon as he was out of hearing, I slipped down the steps and found Charlotte sitting on one of the stone benches in the cross-walk. She had been weeping, and great drops still hung on the dark lashes.

"Magdalena," she said, earnestly, "what we have heard remains a secret between us, always, always! Promise me that."

"Yes, Charlotte," I answered.

"Because he still is my brother," she said, softly, and then broke into bitter weeping.

I sat down beside her, caressed and kissed her, and would so gladly have comforted her had I only known how.

"Do you know what he has done?" I asked.

She shook her head; "I can not think—it must—O, let us leave it, I can not speak it aloud, I suffer so for Gerhardt," and again she bent her head and wept.

As soon as it was quite dark we went up to Aunt Edith. It was very still above, in the old house. Only occasionally came up the murmur of the animated conversation at the dinner-table. They ate in the immense dining-hall on the lower floor, directly under the rooms occupied by Aunt Edith, and to-day the big roasts were turned on spits, in the basement kitchen.

Robert had been with his mother in the interval, and, as she said, had waited a long time with his cousin; he was the last one at the table. And Joachim had come in a moment to see her, as in duty bound to inquire how she was. "He is just the same," she continued, "handsome as a picture, careless, and—shallow. He was angry. I'm quite anxious to know whom he has been quarreling with."

Charlotte did not answer. I furtively seized her hand. Ah, yes. Everything seemed so enviable in that splendid villa, to the careless observer, and yet, sorrow sat there, in some one corner, and looked around with great, lurking eyes, and made anxious, by her presence, all who dwelt beneath its roof.

"Poor Gerhardt, how much he has to trouble him," whispered Charlotte.

Evening came, and as Aunt Edith lighted the lamp, I slipped out. I knew Gottlieb sat in our kitchen, and it was my greatest pleasure to chat a little with the old man. He possessed an inexhaustible fund of fables and stories of his home; of mighty dances on the Blocksberge; of uncomfortable ghosts of the wild hunters, and the giant Bods, who pursued the king's daughter, which he was never weary of relating to George and me.

This evening it was not the desire to hear his tales that drove me out. I was filled with anxiety and unrest. I wanted to see something beside Charlotte's sorrowful face.

Aunt Edith's kitchen was as pleasant as a sitting-room, with its fire-place and the shining copper and brass vessels hanging on the walls, the clean-scoured pine table, the cupboard for the table-ware, the large flowered wall-paper, and the old Dutch clock with its polished brass weights, which ticked on the wall; between hearth and table stood Jette's spinning-wheel; and it was a pleasant picture to look upon Gottlieb's rosy-cheeked grandchild spinning in her clean kitchen.

This evening she was not there; she had gone to carry some soup to some one of Aunt's countless sick people. Gottlieb sat in her place and carved a twirling-stick, a work at which he was peculiarly skillful.

He stood up respectfully as I came in; and after I had

sat down by the hearth, he continued with his carving, and began, without being asked, to relate:

"Far westward, in the depths of the mountains, there runs a pretty stream through the valley that is called the Selke; it has made a fine bed for itself along the meadows and high mountains on both sides, and above, Castle Falkenstein looks boldly down and mirrors its towers and battlements in the clear river.

"Opposite the castle is a mountain that is called the Tidian, and if I had what is hidden there I would be richer than the king; but no one knows in what place the treasure lies, or how to raise it up.

"Many hundred years ago there came a knight from Falkenstein to a goldsmith's in the next town, and asked to see some women's ornaments, for he wanted to buy a gold neck-chain, or bracelets, or some such thing that women love, but there was nothing good enough for him.

"Then the goldsmith brought two little, sparkling coins in his hand, and said: 'Noble Herr Knight, as you do not think that gold fine enough, I will make you a little chain from this, and finer you will not see the world over.' They glistened so they almost blinded the knight, and he said: 'Where have you found such splendid gold?'

"'An old shepherd brings it to me, that is in your service, noble Knight,' answered the goldsmith. Then the knight threw himself upon his steed, and riding home with great speed, summoned the shepherd before him. The shepherd turned pale, but would not tell where he had found the gold, and all the commands and threats were of no avail. Weeks of imprisonment could not make the old man give up his secret. There——"

But I heard no more, for outside in the corridor sounded suddenly a man's voice, in loud, excited tones; almost fiercely it rang out with anger and wine:

"I know you!" cried the voice. "Do you think I have forgotten how, like a sneak, you always took every opportunity secretly to interfere with me, and get the advantage." Old Gottlieb sprang up, and looked anxiously to the door; his rugged old face had grown pale. "I pray you, Joachim," sounded now Robert's deep voice; "you are excited and provoked. I swear to you I have not spoken one word with Gerhardt about your affairs; forget our childhood; we are men now, and I never meant any wrong to you."

A scornful laugh was the answer.

"You miserable knave!" thundered Robert's voice, now full of rage. We heard hasty steps forward, then it was still a moment.

"Reinsberg will further communicate with you," said Joachim, calmly, and each syllable was clearly enunciated.

A spur-clanging step, a door flung to, then no sound, no tone, deep quiet again as before. The knife and stick had slipped from Gottlieb's hands. He stood, deeply troubled, in the middle of the kitchen.

"I feared it! I feared it!" he said, half aloud. "It is just as it used to be. What will come out of it, and what can one do?"

He shook his head helplessly, then he looked over to me, as if he would ask advice; but I had no idea what the quarrel was about, and especially what the last words signified.

"If it had been twenty years ago, I could have taken him by the ear and led him to his father," continued Gottlieb; "but to-day, the father is no more, and the boy has become a man. I can not do anything, Fräulein, and if they both——"

He stopped, and again looked questioningly at me,

but what the old eyes really wanted of me, I did not understand.

"They never could endure each other, Gottlieb, isn't it so, they were always quarreling as children?" I asked, for the sake of saying something.

"Yes, that is true, and an old quarrel is easily renewed. For three days I have gone around in fear and trembling, because I knew they were together, and now it has gone so far, who knows how it will end?"

His head sank, and he stood in troubled thought. "Ah, God pity you;" he spoke low, as if to himself. "What more must be lived through in this house?"

"Tell me, Gottlieb," I said, a nameless dread possessing me, "what do you mean? Is it so dreadful for them to disagree? It is all over now, and they separated quietly——"

"H'm, child, yes, because it was done. They would not fall on top of one another, and tear the buttons off their jackets like school-boys. What did I hear Joachim say? 'Reinsberg will communicate with you further.' Do you see? That was plain, no use to waste any more words; they take a pair of pistols—then it is I or you!"

I had sprung up; I was trembling with fear. "A duel? How terrible!" As quick as lightning a series of fearful possibilities flew through my mind. "Aunt, Charlotte," I whispered; it was too terrible to think of.

"It can not be, it is not possible, Gottlieb!" I stammered. "It is not possible. You must be wrong; why, they dare not do it! Do you hear, Gottlieb, they dare not do such a thing! I—what can I do? O, what can I do?"

I shook the old man's arm with impetuous fear. "Would to God I was mistaken," murmured the old

man, "but I know how it goes. What they have both said they can never take back, and yet it is not worth a charge of powder. What can you do? Nothing, child, nothing. Pray to-night for the old mistress, in there, that the dear God does not take her all. That is all you can do, little one, that is all you can do."

"O, I can try," I cried. "I will go to Robert; I will entreat Joachim——"

"Herr Robert can do nothing," declared Gottlieb, shaking his head. "He was the assailant; and go to Herr Joachim—no Fräulein—I would place myself with outstretched arms before his door. Where the wine has possession of the head, is no place for a pure, young girl."

"Lena! Lena! where are you?" called Aunt Edith at this moment, and her dear face looked around the arras-door that separated the kitchen from her room.

"Quick! come, come, I will show you something, and anything lovelier you have never seen." She reached her hand to me, and seemingly without any will of my own, I went over to her, gave her my hand, and let her draw me from the room.

"Wait a minute," she whispered, in the dark room that usually stood empty, but now occupied by Robert. "There, in the sitting-room, sits something that is one and yet is two, that is transported to heaven, and yet weeps great tears, little one. It is the most beautiful sight that you can see in the world. Observe it closely, that later sometime you may know what it is; and do not forget, in your astonishment, to make a pretty speech. Truly, Lena, are you curious? I think I can hear your breath, it goes so fast, so—now go in."

I wanted to cry out: "Leave me, you poor, dear Auntie!" but she had pushed me swiftly through the door. I groped with my hand after the nearest chair; the room,

the lamp, everything swam before my eyes. Only one thing fastened itself clear and full on my vision. Auntie was right, nothing could be more beautiful in all the world.

There stood the two that were one, close in each other's arms. Charlotte's fair head lay on the breast of the noble-looking man, her eyes were raised to his, full of a tender, fond devotion as if they would say: "Here alone is my place."

His face I could not see, but when he raised his head and looked over to me, I saw that his eyes were red with weeping.

"Little Magdalena," cried Charlotte, "come here and give me a kiss; you little sly one, I have long seen from your shining eyes that you had found out our secret."

She kissed me warmly on the mouth, and by the movement, one of the coils of her lovely hair loosened from its place, and fell heavy and glistening down over her shoulder.

"Like a golden chain, Lottchen," he said, and touched the glorious hair.

"Wait!" she said, merrily, drying quickly the last tears that hung on her lashes. "It shall be a chain for you."

She raised the tress, threw it around his neck and fastened the ends again, so that he was imprisoned in glittering fetters.

"Now you are mine forever. Now nothing can separate us but death—do you hear, you poor man? There is no chance possible for you to run away."

I looked at him anxiously. I saw his face whiten, and saw how he suddenly pressed the slender figure to him.

"Nothing now, Charlotte; but let us not think of that to-night. We live to-day—you and I, and our dear mother—our dear, good mother."

That made Charlotte, with a little cry of love, spring from his arms, and kneel down before the arm-chair of the old lady. They laughed, and wept, and kissed each other, and, between whiles, Charlotte chattered of the green forest, and that she should live there; and, just like her dear little mother, on foot and in her bridal dress, she would go with her husband to the dear, solitary huntsman's house. And Auntie sat listening, the light of blessed joy in her face, and then she threw her arms around Charlotte's neck.

"My little daughter," she said, warmly; "O, who would have thought——"

I could not bear any longer the sight of this happiness, knowing such a danger threatened it. I threw myself on my bed and wept and prayed, and my teeth chattered; I was in a nervous chill. A thousand impossible plans darted through my brain. I reached a hundred conclusions, only to give them up again; and the consciousness of my weakness and powerlessness only enhanced my excitement.

I ran again to the kitchen, but Gottlieb was not there; then my impulse was to go to that room—Joachim's room. I shrank from the handsome man and his rude bearing. He did not know me; but in spite of all I had the courage to go to him. What should I say? I did not know; my heart beat so, I seemed to hear it. Timidly, I laid my hand on the latch—a kind of vertigo seized me. Inside I heard a chair shoved back, and at the same time the howl of a dog in pain, mingled with brutal blows from a whip, that were pitilessly descending on the poor creature.

"You d—n brute!" he screamed.

I flew back, terrified, and close behind me the beast who had been kicked from the room. She was a splen-

did brown pointer. She rushed by me violently and into my room. I cowered down in the darkness near her, and threw my arms around her neck, and the poor creature licked me and whined softly.

From Auntie's room sounded Charlotte's happy voice. She laughed, and joked, and teased. O, I could think how charming she was, in her abandonment and happiness! but I did not wish to see her in my misery.

"My sweetheart is a hunter."

She was singing now her favorite song; and now she was talking again; and now a merry laugh; and sometimes between his deep voice, so soft, so tender. Then she missed me, and before I knew it, Charlotte stood before me with a lamp, and asked, wonderingly, what I was doing with Joachim's Lady.

I was frightened, and yet was glad I could say that Joachim had beaten her so that she ran to my room.

A fleeting shadow passed a moment over Charlotte's rosy face.

"How revolting!" she cried, as she stroked the beast, then drew me back with her into the sitting-room. Lady was shut up for the time being in Robert's room, as a great contest seemed imminent with the cats. With all the self-control I could command, I sat and heard Charlotte build the loveliest air castles. She would "not say a word about her new happiness to-night to Gerhardt, 'for he would not be able to sleep; and sleep is very necessary to him in these trying days;' but to-morrow, when the guests are gone, then I will prepare him with the most skillful diplomacy, and then—Robert, you must come in. O, heavens! what will Ferra say?" she laughed gayly, "and mamma?"

She stopped suddenly.

Robert sat by her side. He seemed to be drinking in

every word from her lips. He held her hand in both of his, and now and then softly stroked her fair hair, as if he could not realize that the beautiful girl at his side really and truly belonged to him.

There came a knock on the door, and a servant entered. He announced that Herr Lieut. von Reinsberg wished to speak with Herr High-forester Berka.

I knew what he wished; yes, Gottlieb was right. I gazed after the slender man as he went to his room with a firm step.

It seemed to me I must catch hold of him, and involuntarily I sprang up and stretched out my hand, then sank back again, trembling in every limb.

"Child, you are ill!" exclaimed Charlotte; "come here; what hot hands you have; you have a chill."

And Aunt Edith commanded I should immediately go to bed.

With all sorts of lively bantering and chatting, they put me to rest, and Charlotte treated me as if I were a baby four years old.

"Now lie still," she said, "and you shall have a lullaby.

'Liesa had a sweetheart,
Gretta wished one as fine.
Ah Gretta, seek valley and mountain,
But there is only one like mine.'"

She sang and laughed. "Did you ever see a better?" I clasped my hot head with my hands; what might now be determined between Joachim and Robert?

"Let her be, Lottchen;" said Aunt Edith, and bent lovingly over me; "she is quite used up. Sleep, my little one; that is the best restorer; sleep; I will come again soon, and see how you are."

And then it was still around me. I was no longer forced to hear their talk of happiness. After a time

Auntie came again, and as she found me awake, she pushed the bed curtains to one side and sat down by me.

"Lena, what do you say to it? I should like to know; for see, I have not gotten over my astonishment yet; I did not suspect such a thing. I was sitting there quietly, telling Lottchen something or other, and there stormed the curly head into the room, and before I knew it, had taken the child in his arms, and then it all came out that they had loved each other for years, and had been promised to one another for a long time. Lotta was frightened, too, at first, for no one ever knew Robert to be so impetuous." She gave a deep sigh, and continued: "What will Charlotte's mother say?"

CHAPTER VIII.

I could not sleep that night. Outside in the corridor, it was long before it was still, and once I heard Joachim's voice giving orders to have early in the morning—at 6 o'clock—two carriages in the park at the red beech.

At 6 o'clock!

I knew that the household would not be stirring much before 8 o'clock. Would they then carry out their dreadful purpose, that would bring such misery to this house? I sat up in bed and thought, and thought. It had now become deathly still in the old house. I could hear Auntie's quiet breathing in the next room. She had no presentiment of the dark shadow that threatened to darken her happiness.

Was it, then, not wrong of Robert, very wrong, that he fettered Charlotte before the decision? or would he for just once feel the joy of possession before he, possibly forever——

And there, in the villa, slept Charlotte. I fancied I could see her smiling in her dreams, or was she awake, also, possibly from anxiety over the judgment of her mother on her choice?

"How will it be to-morrow at this time?" I asked myself, and restlessly tossed myself about the bed; and the gray dawn found me still sleepless, tortured with my thoughts.

Then everything was clear to me. Why had I not thought of it before? Gerhardt must be able to counsel;

Gerhardt alone could help! I slipped, in my stocking feet, to Auntie's bed. She had a little clock there, whose rapid ticking I had heard all night; it was twenty minutes past 5. I looked a moment into the dear face on the pillow; she was smiling in her sleep, her hands folded peacefully on her breast; the glimmer from the night-lamp threw a reddish sheen on the hymn-book that lay open on the little table near the bed.

"Should I to my God not sing?
Should I to Him not thankful be?"

I read on the open page. How full of gratitude her heart was last night. How she prayed for her children, for her new daughter, and for a peaceful future, where all strife and enmity were buried.

Quickly I slipped back into my room and threw myself into my clothes, covered myself with a shawl, latched softly my door, and hurriedly stole down the corridor. The silence of early morning reigned everywhere; only Lady, who lay on the mat before her ill-tempered master's door, raised up her head and growled, then recognized me and followed on behind. There was an uncomfortable twilight in the hallway and a perceptible cold came through the high, open door of the vestibule. Someone was already up, and I had not a moment to lose if I ——

"Yes, what?" I asked myself, as I went with flying steps through the park, and the wet and fog hung to my garments. Gerhardt should know what I heard! Gerhardt alone can help! That rang through my head and heart, and my feet flew yet quicker over the wet, fallen leaves. For a moment I stood still; I thought I heard the crack of a whip and the roll of wagon wheels from the depths of the park; then I went on in anxious haste.

The villa lay before me, and the scarlet leaves of the woodbine gleamed out sharply from the white columns of the charming house.

At some of the windows the curtains were lowered, but the double doors of the entrance to the vestibule were wide open, and above, on the balcony, a housemaid was brushing cushions and mats that were scattered about in countless numbers in Frau von Demphoff's room. Without being seen by her, I walked into the vestibule and up the marble staircase. The covers lay still at one side, and a servant in careless morning dress, with frowzy hair, was busy wiping off the bronze trellis-work.

"Can I speak with Herr von Demphoff?" I asked, breathless, and the servant stared at me with open mouth.

"No," was his answer, "the Herr is still asleep."

"How long will it be before he gets up? I am in great haste; it is very necessary that I speak with him," I said.

"I believe the Herr is not quite well," replied the man, openly showing his astonishment.

"I am very sorry; but in this case you must awaken the gentleman."

Embarrassed, he scratched his ear and murmured something about "ask" and "speak to Anna."

"For God's sake, do not delay, but awaken him at once," I entreated.

But he had already vanished, and in the next moment Anna appeared—my first not exactly pleasant acquaintance in Wendhusen—out of Ferra's room, and looked up at me from the foot of the stairs, anxious and wondering.

"What would the young lady like?" she said, in her malicious tone.

"I must speak with my cousin immediately; please awaken him."

She shrugged her shoulders and pushed back the fresh little morning cap from her forehead.

"I am extremely sorry," she said, flippantly; "but I can not possibly awaken the gentleman; that doesn't belong to my duties."

"Tell the servant to do so," I cried, trembling from anxiety and anger, "do you hear? it is something very important—would I have come here at such an early hour if it were not?"

"I have no commands to give to Joseph," she replied, and stepped back into the open room, where she picked up a dainty feather-duster, and applied herself with such pretension to her work, that I plainly saw a stone would soften sooner than I could make any impression upon her.

"Joseph," I cried, half aloud, but Joseph was again brushing the stairs, and appeared not to hear me.

The blood seemed boiling in my veins; the next moment I was before him. "Go awaken your master immediately!" I cried, commandingly, stamping my foot. "Go this moment!"

He looked at me surprised.

"Why, Cousin! do I see aright?" I heard Gerhardt's voice behind me; I turned, still agitated by the obstinacy of the man; my hands were clenched.

He looked at me surprised and anxious, but directly came to me like a blow the remembrance of what brought me there. He had evidently been long awake, for he was in his accustomed gray morning attire, and had on the high boots that he wore when he rode in the fields; in his hand he held an open letter.

"I must speak with you—quick—before it is too late,"

I stammered, and needing support took his offered arm, and went with him into his room.

"Drink first, Cousin," he begged, and handed me his cup with strong fragrant tea, as he led me to a seat, but I pushed his arm back.

"I thank you, Cousin, later—you have no time—Robert—Joachim——"

I stopped in my rapid speech, for his face had become ashen gray.

"What, Magdalena? speak more calmly. What is it about Robert and Joachim?"

"They quarreled, and Joachim challenged him——"

"Whom?"

"Robert."

He stood motionless, and looked at me as if he doubted my words.

"They were to go away at 6 o'clock," I continued, pointing to the marble clock on the mantel-piece.

"How did you know this, child?"

I related to him, with rapid words, how I had been with Gottlieb in the kitchen; how I overheard the quarrel and the challenge. I gave Joachim's exact words and related how Lieut. von Reinsberg really came to Robert.

Meanwhile Gerhardt had seized his hat, and put on his overcoat; then he hurriedly sought about for something, the well-known gray scarf, and threw it about his neck.

"Come, Magdalena; you have my earnest thanks; I will speak with Joachim."

With quick steps we left the villa and hastened through the park. Several times he looked at his watch, and every time his face darkened. When we finally stood before the door of the old cloister, the clock struck six;

the sharp tones cut through the damp, cold, morning air.

We looked into each other's eyes.

"It is too late," I whispered. "O Gerhardt, Gerhardt, it is too late!"

"Do not be so anxious, Magdalena; go up-stairs; you will be ill with so much agitation; go,dear; I will come as soon as I can bring you any comforting word."

"Is my brother in his room?" he questioned of a servant who was coming toward us.

"Yes, Herr von Demphoff."

Gerhardt moved up the stairs. I followed him, and saw him enter Joachim's room; but at the same moment I saw him turn back and, without noticing me, he rushed by me, and I heard him order his horse. I ran after him and saw him vanish out of the door. My thoughts went with him. Would he be in time? Could he prevent the frightful affair if he were? Perhaps he would not be able to find them. Heavens! it was useless for him to go; who knew where they were? Then came Gottlieb slowly up the stairs.

"Fräulein Lena, you have meant well, but——"

"But, Gottlieb?"

"If you had gone to Herr Gerhardt von Demphoff last evening——"

I was silent; the thought never came to me in my anxiety.

"Gottlieb, why did you not go to my cousin?"

"I? Ah, Fräulein, that is—— You do not understand what it is when two gentlemen challenge each other; no man dares to thrust his nose in between, at least an old, half-discharged servant, that by accident had listened; not even when he many a time has carried them in his arms when they were children, as if they were his own, and watched their every step. No, Fräulein, and if I

knew surely a great misfortune would come of it I would not move a finger—by no means. One could forgive a young girl, if from pure anxiety she should confide to her aunt what was not forbidden her. Yes, if it were yesterday evening, possibly Herr Gerhardt might have been able to do something, but not this morning. They were over the mountains before 6 o'clock, probably to some quiet little spot in the Mill-valley. God grant the best!"

He shook his gray head sorrowfully and stared thoughtfully into space, and I stood near him, shivering and trembling from cold and fear.

"There comes the Herr back again," he said, and I looked over the balusters and saw Gerhardt just coming up the stairs.

"I will not go," he said, briefly; "it would be quite useless. Should I come up with them I could not hinder it. The old, unholy hate," he murmured, and at this moment he looked indescribably ill and broken. Involuntarily I laid my hand on his arm. I wanted to say something comforting, but I could not find the right word in my terrible anxiety.

"How white you are, poor little cousin!" He bent down to me. "Come, Lena, will you not go to your room?"

"No, no," I begged, "I should die with fear and anxiety."

"But where will you stay till the end is known?" he asked. Then he took me, like a child, by the hand: "Have the carriage punctually at 8 o'clock for the gentleman, Gottlieb," he said, "even though—as if nothing had happened. I shall not be here then, you understand? And be sure to be prompt."

"It is best, dear, that you go quietly to your room; I

entreat you to do so," he continued, as I looked up pleadingly into his face. It seemed to me unbearable to be alone. "Go to bed again; Aunt Edith would be worried if she went to your room and found you gone."

I obeyed, and he stood motionless until I had reached my door, then he turned and walked away. I went into the room. Still in the morning twilight, I shook with a nervous chill. I could seem to see grin out of each fold of the curtains a white, ghostly face, from every corner. I expected something horrid to appear every moment.

In my damp clothes I threw myself on the bed and buried my head in the pillow. So I lay—I do not know how long—outwardly quiet, but straining my ears to hear —I knew not what. Outside it was noisy; the gentlemen set out for the hunt, shouting, and calling their dogs, and then it was still again.

Aunt Edith was awake. I crept under the covers. She must not see that I was entirely dressed; but she did not come in. I heard how she softly talked to the cats, and then with Jette; complained of herself for having overslept, and not having been up to see that her son had his coffee.

No! Jette had not made any coffee; the new high-forester must have breakfasted with the other gentlemen.

I sprang up and hastily took off my damp things, and put on my morning dress as if I had just gotten up. Hark! Eager talking and cries in the corridor; feet running along.

"Accident at the hunt!" called someone. "An accident at the hunt!" was repeated before my door. My heart stood still; an icy chill ran through my veins.

Aunt Edith, with a frightened cry, had already gone out, and I followed her as soon as I could control myself. There, below, at the entrance to the Abbess

House were many people; the servants of the estate and others ran past me, all with faces expressing fear and consternation. It was with difficulty that I pressed through the crowd.

"He did it himself! The gun went off itself! Is he dead? No, he is still alive—no, he was killed on the spot!" Such expressions struck my ears.

I can not describe that hour. I only know I found myself in the room from which yesterday I had heard Gerhardt's rebuking voice resound; that he and some other gentlemen were speaking together in a low voice; and that Aunt Edith went about attending to what had to be done, with that calm bearing that a noble woman in the hour of great calamity can force herself to assume.

With whom she was occupied I could not see. The large room was divided in the middle by a heavy, green velvet *portière*. One half was lowered, which concealed whoever was on the bed.

I did not dare to go in, nor even to ask which of the two it was. The door flew open and Ferra burst into the room. Her wild abandonment to grief was terrifying.

"Joachim! Is he dead? Joachim! I know he is. Now I have lost the only one that loved me! Now I have no one more in the world!" She screamed and threw herself on the floor. As Gerhardt turned and went to her, she was like a mad woman.

"Ferra, compose yourself," he commanded, trying to raise the slender figure. "I am still with you. Have I not loved you? Be calm; do not disturb him; possibly it is his last hour."

"You?" she asked, sitting up and shaking back her half-loosened hair that hung down on the white morning dress. "You? Not for a moment were you ever

to me what Joachim is, and never can be. We have never understood one another." And with her hands before her face, she broke out into passionate, almost screaming sobs.

He was about to reply to her, to quiet her, when he involuntarily stepped back; I concealed myself, terrified, in the folds of the curtain. Frau von Demphoff had entered, the paleness of deep agitation on the strong face.

At the same moment Aunt Edith came from behind the *portière*. She carried linen and bandages on her arm, and was upon the point of going out. Both stopped and stood motionless opposite one another. A painful silence pervaded the room for a moment. Ferra's sobs ceased, and she looked with anxious expectancy on the sisters-in-law, who had been enemies for so many years.

"Poor Theresa!"

Aunt Edith went toward her with outstretched hands, her voice melting with emotion and pity. Instead of answering, Frau von Demphoff passed her, snatched back the curtain, and, pointing to the waxen white face on the pillow, she said so loud that the wounded man visibly shrank:

"Do you think that with a few tears and smooth words you can make that good again?"

Perplexed, Aunt Edith looked at the tall woman, whose strange, glittering eyes looked deep into her own.

"I say to you, do not touch my child!" she continued, her voice hoarse with pain and agony, "for I hate you. You have taken from me everything in life that I clung to, everything! And your son, that I loved like my own, has to-day murdered my child!"

"Robert has done it?" shrieked Aunt Edith. "Robert! Gerhardt, speak to me! Am I dreaming? Robert!

Theresa, I can not believe it; poor Theresa! Why should he do it?"

The poor woman sank down at the feet of her sister-in-law, and clung to the folds of her dress.

"I never wronged you knowingly; no, no. You are mistaken."

Heartrending sounded the soft, persuasive voice through the still room.

"See, Theresa," she continued, hastily, "you do not know how Robert has loved you—as his mother; truly, truly as his mother! O, how often have I been jealous of you; how often have I wept when he turned to you! O, let the old hate be forgotten after these many years. See—see my hair has grown white since we have seen each other; there lay hard, pitiless years between; let it be enough! Give me your hand, Theresa, it was not my Robert; O, no. How could you think so?"

"Mother, forbear," I heard Gerhardt say, softly; "Joachim still lives. You will kill her with such words."

I could hear no more. As I closed the door I heard a piercing shriek.

"Robert! Robert!"

It was Aunt Edith.

As if pursued, I flew down the corridor to our room. Impetuously I burst into the room. It seemed to me if I could not scream out I should die; but my mouth was dumb. There, in the middle of the large room, stood Charlotte, and before her lay Robert, his face buried in his hands.

Bright sunshine streamed through the high windows, and enveloped the slender girl's figure as with a halo. Outside the woods were gorgeous with their autumn tints; here, inside, all had become dark, sorrowful night.

"Do not touch me!" cried Charlotte, in a shrill,

strained voice, and shrinking back as Robert caught at her dress. "Go, go; I can—I dare not look at you!"

He sprang up, and walked tottering to the door; once more he turned to her, unspeakable suffering in his eyes. "Charlotte!" sounded imploringly in the room.

"Go!" she repeated, with a hopeless, despairing tone. The door closed, and Charlotte sank to the floor. The next moment I was beside her.

"Charlotte, what have you done?" I cried, flinging my arms about her. "Call him back; do not let him leave you so; say one kind word to him at least."

But she pushed me roughly back, and rose to her feet.

"He will die—Joachim—and I am his sister!" The last words rang out like a hoarse cry of pain. "His sister!" she murmured again, putting her hands before her white, convulsed face.

And when it was evening, a solemn stillness reigned in the rooms of the old cloister—Joachim was dead.

CHAPTER IX.

The funeral was over; the perfume from the flowers and orange trees that stood around the coffin floated through the open windows, and one carriage after another drove away with its black-robed occupants. They were mostly the neighbors of surrounding estates, but many were the comrades of the deceased, who showed, however, very little interest in the sad event. Aunt Edith sat in her chair at the writing-desk, as tearless and benumbed as in her unhappiest days. She and Charlotte had not seen each other. Gerhardt often came to us in this dreadful time, but Aunt scarcely gave any answer to his questions of kindly interest. She touched neither food nor drink; it was a lamentable condition.

I knew that the ladies in the villa had been present at the funeral services, but I had remained with Aunt Edith. Now a great longing possessed me to see Charlotte, and there Auntie sat with closed eyes, and in spite of all my attempts, I could only win a glance from her. So I stole softly out of the room; possibly I could speak a few words with Charlotte; I had not seen her since that night.

As I went down the corridor, on my way to the Abbess House, I met Ferra leading her little son by the hand. She was in deep mourning—a black lace veil was thrown over the beautiful hair that gleamed like gold through the dark meshes. It was the first time I had ever seen mother and son together. The charming boy with the fair, curly head tripped gracefully by her side,

in his white dress and broad, black sash. On his arm he carried a wreath of late roses that hung their pale gold chalices, rich with fragrance.

I went to Ferra and asked after Charlotte. She raised her head and looked at me; not the least trace of a tear had reddened the beautiful eyes. There was on her face an expression which contrasted sharply with her passionate bearing the day of Joachim's death. She seemed entirely consoled. "Charlotte is in the library, or in the white *salon*," she answered. "It would be more sensible if she would control herself a little more. It has not been possible to speak a single word with her. She will not accompany me to the grave. Try what you can do with her. Come, my sweet darling, we will carry Uncle Joachim some flowers;" she nodded to me, and went on.

"We will go to Uncle Joachim," shouted the little one. I went on down the stairs and opened the high bronze door into the room where Joachim died. For the first time I noticed to-day the arrangement of the room. It was the depth of the old Abbess House, divided through the center by green velvet *portières*. The front room was the library; around the walls were shelves of carved oak filled with countless volumes. The other room was a comfortable, even elegant, gentleman's room, the furniture of which was in the style of the beginning of this century, with bronze decorations, inlaid corners, and powerful lion's claws that appeared defiantly to resist the soft, green carpet.

Over the large writing-desk hung the portrait of a lady; it showed the strong features of Aunt Theresa, not softened, though the bloom of youth lay upon the regular face; delicate white skin tinted like the apple blossom; glossy brown hair around the pure, oval face;

but the eyes cold and gray, and the lips firmly pressed together, as they are to-day. I looked around for Charlotte, but could not find her. The folding-doors into the next room stood open; I went in; it was a large *salon*, the room in which the body had lain. Flowers were still scattered over the floor, and many candles flamed out from groups of palms and evergreens, in the middle of which had stood the coffin. From the ceiling hung a chandelier; here also burned candles, which flickered their pale-yellow light up to the ceiling, richly ornamented in stucco. The white walls were a marvel of the artist's skill; dancing nymphs, mermaids, and bacchantes in gauzy drapery, emerged from luxuriant foliage and delicate arabesques, almost too worldly for the *salon* of a very pious, right-reverend Abbess.

In the alcove of the window stood, as immovable as a statue, a slender, black figure, her forehead pressed against the pane—Charlotte. I walked lightly over to her and put my arm around her. As I met her gaze I started—what had three short days made of the fresh, beautiful girl's face! She looked ten years older; her complexion was waxen, her lips were pale, and her eyes lustreless. She sat down on one of the upholstered divans which stood in the window niche, drew me down beside her, and held my hand in her own.

"Mamma is with Gerhardt in there," she said, softly, pointing to a door slightly ajar, "helping to put in order Joachim's affairs. There have come such a quantity of letters—it is frightful; there he lies cold and white, and the survivors must know all that——" She was silent, as if she already had said too much.

"Leave those, mamma," we heard Gerhardt's deep voice. "Do not search into those things; it is best not; leave them for me alone to care for."

"No," she declared, firmly; "I will see how far he—had gone with——"

"Mother," his voice sounded very tender, "that is forgiven and forgotten; let us now think of the good qualities that belonged to him—his fresh, buoyant nature, his adoration for his mother——"

"I will not," she replied, "without reading his words that you are so apprehensive of on his account. What his profligacy has left to me of my own fortune is at your command. Give me the letters."

"I thank you," answered Gerhardt, "but it would involve too large an amount of your income; it is more than you think."

During several minutes only the rattling of papers disturbed the silence; then a short, sharp "What is that?" and the same instant, a commanding "Give me back the letter; I will have proof!—draft with forged——"

The voice broke with the last few words; a long pause ensued.

"Does anyone know, Gerhardt, does anyone know of this?" she asked, in a lifeless tone.

"No one, dear mother. The same morning that I received that anonymous letter—you know it is against my principles to pay any attention to anonymous accusations, but in this were particulars which unfortunately gave me no doubt of the truth of the information—I took Joachim in here and—but let us leave that, mother; the draft is already in my hands."

"Do you know, Gerhardt," she cried out, bitterly, "do you know I thank God on my knees that He has taken him? and yet no mother is so wretched as I. Almighty God, I thank Thee that Thou hast not permitted the disgrace to be known. And that was my son, whom I loved and cared for, and whom I was so proud of! I

was nearly wild with grief when——" The words died away in moaning sobs.

"He was young, mother, spoiled; he was unlucky—it came so easy that——"

"Never!" she cried, in loud and grief-stricken tones. "How dare a man forget what he owed to himself and to the honorable name of his parents? He became a knave, the first in the long rank of his ancestors; he has brought shame on all; he—O, you can not think, Gerhardt," she continued, low and rapidly, "what anxiety I have had about him. Do you think I have passed a peaceful night for years, because of the worry how to satisfy his demands? Do you think I have a stone left in my jewel-casket?" She laughed aloud. "Not one! And yet, and yet—what was the cause of the duel?" she asked, after a pause. Gerhardt was silent a moment.

"Joachim had accused Robert of being the writer of the anonymous letter," he said, finally; "Robert denied the gross accusation, and gave his word of honor that he was not the writer, whereupon Joachim shrugged his shoulders; what followed was the natural result. Robert called him a pitiful knave!"

"And Joachim challenged him?" interrupted his mother.

"Yes. After he came to his better self, Robert tried, quite against his principles, to settle the matter amicably, but in vain. Unfortunately, I did not know of the affair until too late to interfere, otherwise I should have sought to hinder the duel by every means in my power. At the place of meeting, Robert, as well as the seconds, made every effort to bring about an amicable arrangement, but Joachim's conditions were such that there was no choice left to Robert. With the words, 'Very well, I did all that was possible,' Robert agreed, and in the first shot

was slightly wounded in the arm by Joachim, while he evidently fired over his adversary's head. The second shot, Joachim, embittered by Robert's forbearance, fired without waiting for the word of command, but also without hitting Robert, who very quietly raised his weapon with the view simply to maim his dangerous antagonist and make him harmless. Robert is a fine pistol shot, but at the instant of the discharge Joachim stepped to one side and sank, fatally wounded, to the ground."

"God took him at the right time," said the woman's voice, cold and almost cruel. "I wish to know now how much I have to give to secure him, at least before the world, an irreproachable memory. What I possess, Gerhardt, is at your disposal. We will economize, Ferra, Charlotte, and I. This evening I shall expect your account."

At this moment she suddenly appeared at the *salon* door, erect and proud. She did not see us; her eyes were fixed on the spot where the coffin had stood; then she came over and put out the candles, one by one, while a bitter smile played around her mouth.

"Laurel," she said, ironically, "there is nothing true in life; it is all a lie."

In alarm, I concealed myself behind the curtain, while Charlotte remained motionless; only her eyes followed her mother's movements. On a chair lay the helmet and sabre of the deceased. The black-robed figure looked with gloomy brow on the emblems of honor that had lain upon the coffin of the officer; then suddenly the tall figure reeled; she sank on her knees before the chair and laid her arms around the shining helmet; very lovingly she caressed with her cheek the cold steel, and the bitterest weeping sounded through the still room. He was doubly dead to her.

Charlotte drew me softly and hastily away.

"She must not know that you have seen her, Lena."

"Will you not come to Aunt Edith?" I said, timidly.

"When I feel strong enough; do not urge me," she replied, and began to descend the stairs.

"Are you going to the cloister garden?" I asked. She nodded, and so we silently walked through its still paths. But ah, what a change since we were there last!

Then suddenly Charlotte stood still and steadied herself against a shrub almost stripped of its foliage by the autumn frosts; from the other side of the wall a fresh, boyish voice was singing:

"There flew away a falcon
High above me in the blue;
Falcon, seest thou my lover?
Say to him I will be true.

"Where oaks and beeches tower,
There scents wild roses' breath;
But should I lose my lover,
I should grieve myself to death."

The tears for the first time gushed from her eyes. "Come!" she said, "I will go to Aunt Edith."

CHAPTER X.

Weeks passed, and November made its entrance with a beautiful snow-storm, and the great flakes whirled merrily around the high old trees in the park. Through the naked branches one could see glimmer the white walls of the villa; and behind it raised themselves, like an unchangeable gray background, the mountains. One might have thought them to-day a black tempest brewing behind the house.

It was very gloomy in the old cloister. Aunt Edith remained benumbed with grief; no fond words, no caresses, could rouse her from her apathy. I clung to her, as did her old Minka, who really seemed to be unhappy; but at this time no creature had power to touch her poor, sick heart. She would stroke my hair, but in an indifferent way. True, she took up her knitting again. But she visited neither her poor nor her sick, for fear of seeing a stranger; and so it came about that I went, through wind and storm, through the dirty town, into the huts of the poor, and gradually accustomed myself to intercourse with them.

Gottlieb was my faithful companion, and protected me from any insolence. It was long, however, before I learned to judge how much to help, and when help was needed.

Except to go to church, Aunt Edith never went out.

"God has forgotten me," she said, gloomily, and stroked back with her hand her white hair. That was a

sad, sad time; and how often I took refuge in my room, and wept from worry and heartache!

From Gottlieb, after many days, I first learned what had happened to Robert; and a terror filled me when he told me Robert was serving sentence in the jail..

"O, how unjust, Gottlieb!" I cried. "He could not help what happened; he did not intend to do it."

"No, that is true; but that made no difference," replied the old man. "That evening after Herr Joachim died, Herr Berka drove to town with Herr von Demphoff, and gave himself up, and—— But I do not know how it happened; Herr Berka received six months' imprisonment."

"And he must be in a cold, dark dungeon, without light, and only bread and water!" I cried, terrified.

"It is not so bad as that, little one," said Gottlieb, soothingly. "He has a warm room, and can walk when he will, and eat what he wishes. Thank God, he is not in the penitentiary."

"Do Aunt Edith and Charlotte know?"

"Frau Berka knows, and Fräulein Charlotte, I think, also. But they never speak of it."

Poor Charlotte! She came every day at a certain hour through the park. I would watch at the window with impatience until I saw her slender, black figure appear around the bend in the road. She walked as though she were worn out; and every time I saw her it seemed as if the delicate face became smaller and more transparent. And she would come in and sit herself at Auntie's feet, and talk of indifferent things; and at the same time the most passionate pain quivered about the pale lips.

Gerhardt was deeply troubled over the sad change. He divided his time between business and his sister. Often his light wagon was before the gate to take us for a

drive; he was very careful to avoid the road on which was a sign-post, "To Fölkerode 4 miles," for, though he did not know, he felt that Charlotte's deep mourning was worn more for a sweet, dead happiness than for her brother. And it was touching to see the large, stately man in his never-wearying attention to the pale, beautiful girl and the grief-stricken woman in the old cloister.

"I thank you, Cousin," he said to me, one day; "you are so kind to and thoughtful for Charlotte; you do not know what a comfort it is to me to know that."

"O, but I can do nothing," I said, regretfully.

"You do much. Do you think I have no eyes for your little services? How you bring her a flower, and tell her little reminiscences of your home; anticipate Aunt's every wish, and prepare for her, in the kitchen, some special dainty?"

"O, that is all quite natural," said I, blushing at the warmth of his words.

"Very true, little Cousin, but it pleases me."

Ferra came once to the "unfortunate," as she herself expressed it, to say some words of sympathy. She seemed to be playing a new rôle; she was excessively subdued, and an excessively fond mother. Formerly she used to complain of her limited means, and the little she could do for her boy; but now she talked with real enthusiasm as she related how the little rogue wanted a horse and cow, and she was sure he was made for a farmer. And when, one day, Gerhardt took him on his lap and asked, "What will the boy be?" the child's laughing face became earnest, and he said, most solemnly, "Like Uncle Gerhardt." Ferra laughed unnecessarily loud, but whether from embarrassment or joy at this answer, it was hard to decide. Gerhardt, however, sat

the child down on the floor, and a strange smile played over his features.

It was a snowy November day when she made her first visit to the old cloister.

Charlotte sat at Aunt Edith's feet, and Gerhardt had been trying to interest her in some Christmas preparations he had in contemplation.

"No, no," she said, turning away abruptly, "do not ask me, Gerhardt; I wish to see no light and joy. Lena will help you."

I had placed two chairs in the middle of the room, put over them a skein of yarn, and, child-fashion, was winding it into a ball by walking around in a circle.

"I will help you, Cousin," said Gerhardt; and the next moment he sat before me with the yarn on his outspread hands. He laughed over it; and into Charlotte's pale face came a friendly brightness, while I stood before him, trying bravely to do good work, and wind my ball loosely. It was certainly a nicer way to wind it, but he was unskillful and let some strands slip off his hands, and that made a snarl. "Now possess yourself in patience, Cousin," I said, and bent over the yarn; the ball had to be put through times without number and still the thread remained tied. "With patience and time the mulberry leaf will be a satin dress," said Cousin Gerhardt, jokingly, as he saw I was getting nervous. He sat there so comfortable that I felt the blood rushing to my head. "Christiana says patience is a noble plant, but does not grow in all gardens," I said, pulling impatiently on the yarn.

"Then it must be planted," remarked Gerhardt, calmly. "Not so strong, or you will break the thread."

I bent down lower, half ashamed, else I should have heard Ferra enter; I saw her first, when she stood close

by Gerhardt, and her eyes flew in surprise and annoyance from him to me.

"That is very comfortable and charming," she said, with a drawl, "an idyll *à la* Voss. Mamma is waiting, however, impatiently for you to write a letter to her attorney and you——"

"Have already done so," he completed, "and mother has sent it to the post long since."

She turned her back to him, angrily, and addressed herself to Aunt Edith.

"Dear Aunt, I have not spoken with you since that unhappy day," she began, and laid a moment her slender, white hand on the old lady's arm, who was knitting zealously. She stopped, and looked questioningly at the beautiful woman. "You must not grieve so bitterly, dear Aunt," she continued. "Of course, it is very sad; we all are still quite unnerved by the blow, and Robert especially." Aunt Edith had quietly laid down her knitting, and stood up.

"I know already, child, I know already what you would say; but spare me, I can not speak of it." And she went to her room and locked the door.

"Heavens! Aunt acts exactly as if her son lay over there, too," murmured Ferra, irritably. "It is horrible in Wendhusen these days, to put it mildly. No one speaks a sensible word. Mamma is stiller and colder than— it is perfectly senseless to act so, as if the Lord had taken from us everything, everything with Joachim."

During this speech I wound the last of the yarn from Gerhardt's hands, and said to him, pleasantly, "Thank you ever so much."

"By the way, Gerhardt, I am glad I met you," said Ferra, rushing up to him and clasping her hands over his arm. "Anna said to me to-day you had notified her.

I had to laugh aloud, but the silly thing sits and weeps, and protests that Herr Gerhardt had said to her she was to be discharged at the end of the quarter. Isn't that a ridiculous misunderstanding?"

"Not at all, Ferra," he replied, calmly. "You found it necessary to engage a governess for your little one without consulting me—the nurse did not please you—notwithstanding the fact that you must have noticed that mamma had begun to practice strict economy in her household; and you are not in ignorance for what reason she is forced to do so. Charlotte has never had a maid for herself alone. Your governess, although her abilities to teach must lie completely useless here—for the boy is still too small—draws a salary that, with the sinfully high wages this Anna receives, counts up a large sum. Moreover, setting aside all that, Anna must leave my house, because I will have only pleasant and obliging people in my service."

"Gerhardt!" cried out Ferra, and her eyes flashed ominously upon him; "do you not know that this person is indispensable to me? She knows me, and my nervous condition; I can not do without her."

"I regret it, Ferra, but I can not retract what I have said."

"What offense has she committed? To whom has she been disagreeable? I will reprimand her."

"To what purpose? She can not remain, Ferra."

"I will not let her go!"

Ferra's eyes were full of tears, and she stamped her foot angrily on the floor. Gerhardt rose and took his gray hat from the table.

"Gerhardt, I will give up the governess." The tears were now running down her cheeks.

"That is not necessary, Ferra. My reasons are well

founded. In justice, she should have been discharged nearly four weeks ago, but at that time I forgot her offense in the sad days that followed. Pray say no more; it will do no good." He said this in a kind but very decided way, and, after a few pleasant words to me, he left the room.

"O, it is maddening!" cried Ferra. Then, after a moment's silence, her glance rested full on me, and a long-drawn-out "Ah!" passed her lips.

She tapped her forehead with her finger. "Heavens! what a fool I was!" she cried, walked two or three times up and down the room, and then, stopping in front of Charlotte and me, said, with the most melting accents:

"Gerhardt is suffering; I should not have contradicted him; one forgets it again and again, when one sees him apparently so large and strong. Only yesterday Doctor Weber said his lungs were in a very bad condition. Anna may go, if he insists. Poor Gerhardt, how irritated he was!"

"If he heard you now he might possibly be irritated, Ferra," remarked Charlotte. "I thought him very calm; you were the one who was irritated."

"True, I was hasty," said Ferra, and bent her beautiful head. "I will try and compensate for it, and will gladly give up my intended journey to B—. No one knows how long we shall have him with us. Joachim's death has cruelly affected him."

"You can take your journey with perfect safety; you will find him well and sound when you return. I do not deny that at present he is not in his best condition."

"And you can say that, Charlotte!" exclaimed Ferra. "I think we have seen how it goes. Who could have believed that poor Joachim——"

She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and was

silent. Charlotte did not reply. She hugged Minka up to her and stroked her, and as she saw the creature still wore the red ribbon around its neck, she took the shears and cut it off and threw it into the fire; then she called the others and took off their ornaments that she had put on so full of laughter and happiness. When she had finished, she stood by the fire and looked thoughtfully into the red glow; then she said:

"Lena, we will help Gerhardt with his Christmas preparations, will we not?"

"Are you not going home?" Ferra asked, looking at me. She sat now in the big easy-chair by the fire. I looked at her in bewilderment, and her eyes rested on my face with a peculiar expression.

"I have no home," I answered, in a low voice, and my eyes filled with tears. The Christmas before the dear mother had arranged and lighted the tree.

"But the pretty little boy there, how rejoiced he would be!" she remarked.

"He is with strangers at a pension, and—Cousin Gerhardt——"

"But your guardian?"

"He has no wife; and his housekeeper is so angry when he has visitors. No, that could not be; but Cousin Gerhardt has promised me that George may come here——"

"So you have wound him about your finger, I see, you little flatterer!"

She bent down to me, and ran her fingers in my hair.

"Curls, child, are exceedingly unbecoming to you; why do you not put your hair in a net, or in braids?—look, so!"

And with a firm hand she gathered my hair together,

and braided it with a remarkably deft hand, and fastened the two thick but very short braids on the back of my head.

"There, that is at least orderly," she said, praising her work. "Do you know how you looked, little one, when you first came with the tangled curls? Like a roving gypsy girl. I must say I was ashamed of you. This is better, much better."

I ran to the glass, and shrank back. She had drawn straight back from my forehead the little curls that naturally framed my face. Something ugly and strange was looking at me.

"O, fie!" I exclaimed, disgusted; but I did not dare change anything, for that I had been running around looking like a roving gypsy girl made me blush with shame.

"What do you mean by fie? I find, unfortunately, that they do not trouble themselves enough about you in such matters," declared Ferra. "I think, also, you are too old to be running about with such short dresses; one can see from your feet to your ankles. Shocking! If you at least had elegant boots, but—— To-morrow I will lengthen your dress."

"That is not necessary, Ferra," Charlotte broke in, and a sarcastic smile played around her pale lips. "I am expecting a package every day from my shoemaker, and in it will be something for Lena. Let the dress, please, remain as it is; her two new winter dresses I have expressly ordered to be made as short as that. You see, she is cared for."

For a moment, Ferra stood literally with open mouth. "Who is so astonishingly liberal?" she asked.

"What a question, Ferra! Who but Gerhardt? You know——"

"Ah, that accounts for the reduction of expenses."

"But, Ferra," cried Charlotte, indignantly, "I think that is fully understood. Gerhardt pledged himself to take care of Lena and her brother. Pray do not act as if you knew nothing of it."

"It certainly is news to me. Heavens! how many more has Wendhusen got to harbor and support?"

These words were like sharp knives through my heart. Never in my whole life had anyone said so candidly that I was a superfluous, useless thing, which only existed through favor. I had been so contented with Aunt Edith until now that every evening of my life I had folded my hands and thanked God for all the love and kindness that had been lavished on the waif. To-day—this moment—for the first time I remembered the words Christiana had said to George: "Only out of favor and pity."

Charlotte looked indignantly at her sister. But whether she did not wish to call out any further expression or was too tired, at all events she was silent. But the hot blood rushed rebellious through my head.

"I did not come here willingly!" I blurted out. "I had ten times rather have stayed in B— and taken a place and been near George. But I was not allowed to do that. I was brought here. I also know why; so it could not be said a Fräulein von Demphoff was a nurse or companion. O, if I could, I would go away to-day, and never come back!"

"For heaven's sake, what a temper!" cried Ferra. "Do you not remember, Lottchen, that I called your attention, the first evening, to that obstinate face? Bah! my child, control yourself. It does not affect me, and certainly does you no good to run on so. I think you remain here very willingly."

"Yes, because I can not leave Aunt Edith alone now," I retorted.

Then suddenly the thought of going away came before me as something not to be endured.

"Now, do you see?" said Ferra, lightly, "always ready to fly up at the least word. Every one is not so privileged as you. I must submit with all possible amiability and gentleness, and discharge a person who is almost indispensable to me. I will give you some well-meant advice. Try not to be so sensitive. It is not becoming in you, under the circumstances."

She stood before the glass as she spoke, and threw her black lace veil again over her head, and the young, fresh face looked very charming from under it. Then she buttoned up her dark, fur-trimmed, velvet jacket, picked up her long train, and, pointing out to the snow-storm, she asked, somewhat more amiably:

"Isn't that fine? But I had to go out before I announced to Anna her discharge. What do you think, Lotta? I am going to get her a situation in the village. Then Gerhardt is helped as well as I, and she can still have charge of my wardrobe."

"O, Ferra, it is quite indifferent to me," said Lotta, wearily.

"Adieu, adieu!" called the beautiful woman, and murmured, as she went out, something about "insufferable weeping willows."

I had meanwhile formed a resolution; and as Aunt Edith came back into the room and sat with Charlotte before the fire, I went into my room and wrote a long letter to Christiana, and when it was finished I carried it to Gottlieb to post.

Some days later I received an important package, and now every night I sat at the little table before my bed

and drew the thread through my work until the clock struck midnight. The beechwood in the Dutch tiled stove snapped and crackled, and filled the large room with comfortable warmth, while outside the snow lay over path and field, and the north wind swept down from the mountains and blew whistling and cold against the window, as if to see who in the old cloister was sitting up so late, and what she was doing by lamplight. Sometimes a fear would possess me, when the thought would come that I was the only one awake in the great, ghostly house, and I would look around timidly, thinking one of the bronze carved doors would open, and a slender figure in black garments, with a veil over her head and a wreath of roses, would glide over the parquet and look at me with surprised and ghostly eyes. Sometimes I would think of Joachim, and believe I could hear his angry voice outside, and when a screech-owl fluttered against the window with its shrill cry, I threw away my work and buried my head in the pillow on the bed, scolding myself, and yet trembling with unutterable fear.

However, the next night I was at my work, and secretly the packages passed to and fro between Christiana and me, and as the Christmas festivities approached, I held, one evening, twelve bright thalers in my hand, and this small sum gave me a joy that no amount of gold in later life was able to give. Charlotte came every day in this sad Christmas time, no matter what the wind or weather was, and, after a walk or drive, she would come and cut the material that Gerhardt so liberally supplied us with, and we would make it into garments, small and large. She did all this very faithfully and conscientiously. She would sit for hours bending over her work with a still patience that contrasted painfully with her once buoyant, active temperament. Three or four times

I would have to speak to her, sometimes, before I could get her attention, when I wished some directions about the work, and when she would raise her eyes she would look at me in a dazed sort of way, as if she were trying to collect herself, and imperceptibly the beautiful features sharpened and the slender figure drooped under its weight of sorrow. She did not complain; she did not weep; but her every movement, her every glance, her languid laugh, said more than words.

I saw all this with ever-increasing anxiety. I saw Gerhardt's look of apprehension when she would lean upon his arm, showing her failing strength, and his troubled shake of the head when he would sympathetically ask her if she felt ill, and she would answer listlessly, "No, thank you, dear." Yes, I knew how she was suffering, and was powerless to help. . I dared not even allude to it, for the day Joachim died she had requested me to keep silent. She did not wish the relationship which had existed between herself and Robert to be known.

At last Aunt Edith became observant, and from the instant she recognized how frightfully changed her favorite was, it seemed to put new life into her.

She began to talk with us once more. She sewed with us, and questioned Charlotte more than was necessary in order to divert her thoughts by making her talk. And Charlotte answered, because she was so glad to see Aunt Edith show again interest and sympathy in her surroundings. And so, because of their great love, they encouraged one another to hide their pain deep in their breast.

It was touching to see how the young, wounded creature, whose flowers of hope were ruthlessly crushed in a moment, without warning, would cling to the old

woman; how lovingly she would kiss the slender hands and smile at her in such a way it would force the tears from Aunt Edith's eyes. They forgot themselves in each other. Both thought of a lonely, snow-covered huntsman's house in the deep forest, and then of the dark, narrow fortress; of the home so recently earned and now deserted, and the lost, unspeakably dear, happiness.

At such moments Charlotte would press her hands against her breast, and her eyes, so large and dark, would look into space with an expression of pain and intensity as if she could see, through the walls into the far distance, the solitary, unhappy man, how he wandered about, restless and rebellious against his bitter fate.

"He is thinking of us," she would say sometimes, half aloud; "I can feel it, I know it, Auntie."

She was right; where else would his thoughts flee but to them?

Yes, he thought of them.

CHAPTER XI.

One day, Charlotte came over later than usual. Aunt Demphoff had been on a journey, and had only just returned a few hours before. Charlotte seemed much disturbed, and there were two red spots on her cheeks.

"Gerhardt goes directly after Christmas to the South, by the physician's orders," she said, after a little while of deep silence, while she hastily felt around in the large work-basket, without taking out any piece. "I am to go with him. O, my God! I can not go away from here;" and she broke into sobs, and cowered down at Auntie's feet.

"There, there, my darling; go with him. You are young; it will help you to go out into the world, the beautiful, splendid world."

"No, I can not, Aunt Edith!" she almost screamed. "Do you think that I forget for one moment that I have lost Robert? Do you not believe that everything of beauty that I see only doubly reminds me that there is no more happiness for me on earth? Ah, if I had died long, long ago! Now I must live, one day after another, always to—always to—without——"

The disjointed words died on her lips.

It was the first passionate complaint I had heard from her lips. The old lady seized Charlotte's hands, but she did not look down at her. Her lips were pressed closely together, and an unutterably bitter expression lay on the fine face.

"If I could help you, poor child, I would give my heart's blood," she murmured, finally. "I would live over again the long years of pain, if I could by doing so spare you."

"Yes, you are right, life is a pain, when I know how unspeakably beautiful it can be; but this pain, Auntie, I can not endure it much longer; I believe an end must come soon."

The old lady laughed ironically.

"It is not so easy to die, my child. Yes, that would be a blessing, but the dear God, Whom they call the Just, has not been so good to me. Look at me; for twenty-four years I have wished to die; there were days when I prayed, each one, to die. But my life went on; after each day came the night, and then again a day, until now—— No, no, my child; it is long to the end, and—you are still young."

She was much agitated, but she controlled herself, and laid her hand on Charlotte's arm.

"You are still young, Charlotte," she repeated, in a changed, gentler tone, "and I am old, and bitter. You will yet live to see a thousand happy hours. Misfortunes do not follow every one as they have me."

"I will not have happiness!" cried Charlotte, passionately, suddenly springing to her feet and drawing herself up to her full height, with her head thrown back. The eyes looking out from the long lashes had a glint of desperation in them. Then she buried her face in her hands, and moaned: "What could I do with it alone!"

Aunt Edith sprang up, a great pity on the old face; it was as if the last words of the girl had aroused her out of her own grief, showing her a young, cruelly hurt being, who, without encouragement, without loving support, must lose itself in despair.

"Charlotte!"

She drew the girl to her; she tried to comfort her; she knew not what to say; but I saw how her lips quivered, and how her trembling hands stroked the fair hair. Involuntarily she reached to the sewing-table and took up the New Testament, in which she formerly read each day, but which she had not opened since that unhappy hour. When I saw this movement my heart grew light. It had seemed so dreadful to me that Aunt Edith's deep, God-fearing nature had become so cold, so defiant to all, all attempts at consolation.

But almost instantly she drew back her hand from the little black book and stretched out her arms, as if repelling something. It was not strange that she thought she saw an apparition, for there in the door stood—dark, gloomy, phantom-like—Aunt Demphoff!

What did she want? How came she here?

Charlotte, who had been startled by Aunt's hasty movement, gazed into the rigid features of her mother; then she stepped in front of Aunt Edith, as if she would draw away from her the searching glance of the tall woman who came with unsteady steps toward Charlotte and offered her hand to Aunt Edith.

"I come to take back the hard words I spoke to you when your son had shot mine," she began, in her cold, hard voice, without further preparation, and dropped again the hand that had not been taken. "One does not weigh one's words in such an hour. I know now that your son was forced into the duel; I know how far it was from his intention to bring this grief upon me; I know that it was only an unfortunate accident, and therefore——" She ceased, and drew a deep breath; "and therefore," she began again, "I have been to B— and prayed His Majesty for Robert's pardon. Robert is already on

his way to Fölkerode, or will leave C— to-morrow. I hope I have proved to you that I realize the wrong I did you; and Edith—I—ask your forgiveness for my hard words. It shall not be said that I am unjust."

Aunt Edith did not move.

"I thank you, Theresa," she said, and her voice sounded nearly as hard as the one that had been speaking. "It is pathetic that a mother should pray for the pardon of the murderer of her son; and that you should come to tell me, is a conquering of yourself——"

"That you did not expect," volunteered Frau von Demphoff, and her lip curled.

"Certainly not, Theresa, for it is twenty-three years since your feet have crossed this threshold, and to this day I do not know what I did to you that you should avoid me as if I were an outcast. Forgive me if I can not thank you as I should like, but the words will not pass my lips. Lately, when your darling boy lay there, pale and wounded, all the long, sorrow-laden years seemed to have vanished; my heart was soft and tender; I was able to give love and forgiveness. To-day it is not so. A stone fills my breast, and—and if to-day, as in former years, you alienated the heart of my boy from me, I should not heed it, for I have no longer any feeling."

It seemed as if the old lady grew as she said these words, she was so imposing as she stood before the large figure of her sister-in-law.

"How glad I am, Theresa," she continued, "that I can say this to you to-day. Long, long, have I desired to do so! I have been most unhappy, and I hold you responsible for the most of my suffering. You drove me from my father's house, and in the night and storm I left it like one dishonored. You have made my

years of widowhood intolerable to me. You influenced my brother to turn against me. You, and you only——"

"Aunt! Aunt!" cried Charlotte, and seized the old lady's outstretched arm; "mamma did not mean to harm you, dear Aunt."

Frau von Demphoff never moved an eyelash; her large, white hand lay quietly on the back of a chair. "Go, Charlotte!" she commanded. Her eyes scanned the room, and rested on me. I had placed myself behind the curtain, terrified at what was passing. "Take her with you," she said, coldly, pointing to me. Mechanically I rose and walked past the large woman, who followed me with a dark, piercing glance, until she herself closed the door after Charlotte and me.

Then we sat in Auntie's sleeping-room, and scarcely dared to breathe. Charlotte fixed her eyes on the high bronze door which had closed behind us. At first we could not understand what was being said; we could hear Aunt Edith's low voice, but the words were indistinct. Then sounded the strong, penetrating, hard tones that filled me with fear. Charlotte sprang up and stepped to the door as if she would enter, but her hand sank to her side, and paler than before she waited. I had involuntarily followed her; and now every word came distinctly to my ears.

"I loved him—how much, that I alone know. He passed me by on your account. Do you know what jealousy is? You can not know. I, however, have tasted it; I know the torture; it is worse than madness. I never belonged to those who love one man, and forget him for the next who offers his heart and hand, and then swear an oath that this one, and only this one, was my first and only love. I was no trifler. What I once seize, that I hold fast. Berka gave me very little notice, but I

loved him, and the less he cared for me, the more my love grew, until it became undying; and in spite of that I was betrothed; in spite of that I married. I believed myself strong enough to do it, and proud enough. No one should know that I had been so weak as to give my love without return. I schooled myself—I began to forget—until I saw you with him. Then that unholy passion took complete possession of me, and it never left me, not even after his death. I could not see you, Edith, without losing my self-control. I do not know who was the most to be pitied, I or you. Yes, you turn from me. You were always the personification of all virtues, and you can not understand that the woman who possessed the heart of the best and noblest of men was untrue to him in every thought. I do not know myself how it happened. I wrestled and struggled with myself in the unceasing contest. I prayed God might help me to conquer the unfortunate passion, or else— It never left me; it drove me even to take his child to my heart, and feel and show toward it a tenderness my own children never knew."

It had become very still in that room; we heard only the soft, quick ticking of the little clock by Auntie's bed.

I looked up to Charlotte for enlightenment. Could it be possible it was that cold, heartless woman speaking those words—words that swept over one like a hot, scorching breath.

"I would have peace, Edith, at any price," she continued. "I began the wrong way. I would not see you or Robert, and became hard toward all mankind. Everything was exemplary in my house, but cold, so cold, I was myself frozen—I chilled my husband and children. Yet I left no duty unfulfilled, had they loved me. I feel it now to be just that Joachim is lost to me." Again she

was silent, and when Aunt Edith spoke we knew she was weeping. She talked a long time, and occasionally was a word spoken that sounded almost entreating and soft.

"——Because I detested her as much as you," said Aunt Demphoff, again speaking. "Before they came my husband had never complained of me—had possibly not known that it could be different between us. Then he saw his brother's young happiness. O, how I hated their absorption in one another! They saw only each other. What one thought, the other thought. And it appeared to me the eyes of my husband were directed oftener than necessary on the happy, young wife, and that they rested reproachfully on me afterward. I knew he was making comparisons. Never had there been such sunshine in our house. How it flooded them both!

"I was not deceived in my misgivings. I remember as if it were to-day the first passionate scene between us. I was gloomier than ever, and of course formed a more marked contrast to the pretty, elfish creature. It was very natural that he should at first reproach me playfully for my coldness and reserve, and, as in jest, to hold up this careless creature, not capable of a serious thought, as an example to imitate of a wife who really understood how to make her husband happy.

"How that mortified me! It turned every drop of my blood to ice. I found myself and my faithfulness to duty humiliatingly ignored. I felt this so keenly that I said to myself, I will never change. And, as with vulture's claws, a fear seized me that I should lose what alone made life of any worth—the love of my husband! Possibly I saw everything distorted at that time; but the art and manner in which the coquettish creature displayed her charms before his earnest eyes, and the evi-

dent enjoyment he received from her raillery, drove me wild, and then—you know the rest."

Then Charlotte drew me almost roughly through the open door into my room, and pushed me down on the old-fashioned sofa. I did not know at that time why she would not let me stay where I was. I had not understood a word of what they were saying; had not known that the frivolous coquette they were speaking of meant my mother—my mother whom I revered as possessing everything on this earth that could adorn a noble woman.

When I had time for thought, the short sketch of that woman's life took hold of me with great power. All this suffering, these mistakes, had sprung from human love—this love that I had placed before me as the most wonderful and blessed thing in all human life. There sat Charlotte; what had it done for her, this joyous maiden? Would she not have been a thousand times happier if she had never loved Robert? And those two in that room? I turned to Charlotte with the question that sprang to my lips:

"Charlotte, would you not rather have never known Robert Berka?"

She turned her head and looked at me. There was a flash in her blue eyes that recalled the old Charlotte of happy days.

"O, child, how you question!" she replied, and a lovely color spread over her pale face. "What could I be without that remembrance? I never should have known how beautiful life can be."

That seemed to me very illogical from Charlotte. I wanted to retort, "You do not need that remembrance, for if you had it not you could not be unhappy." But I was silent. There was something in her answer that

left me thoughtful; and so we sat without speaking, and it grew dusk in the room. Then Charlotte got up and went into Auntie's room; and when I, after a long time, ventured timidly to look in through the door, I saw Aunt Edith sitting alone before the sofa table; the lamp was burning, and threw its light full on a tear-wet face, and before her lay the little black book.

"Such weeping does one good, Lena," she said, getting up; "but the eyes burn from it, and do not see well. Sit here, child, and read to me."

She showed me a place and leaned back in her chair. It was Psalm LXXVII, and I began to read aloud:

"I cried unto God with my voice, and He gave ear unto me.

"In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my sore ran in the night and ceased not; my soul refused to be comforted.

"I call to remembrance my song in the night; I communed with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search.

"Will the Lord cast off forever, and will He be favorable no more?"

"Stop, Lena." And after a long pause she asked: "How reads the fourteenth verse?"

I read:

"Thou art the God that doeth wonders. Thou hast declared Thy strength among the people."

"Amen!" she interrupted. "Who would have believed that we would ever come together?" she began again. "Now, after all these years, so much that was dark is made clear between us, and Robert comes back; I shall go to him—both will go—she and I."

"Charlotte!" I cried, hastily.

"No," she replied; "Theresa von Demphoff. It is as if I dreamed—Thou art the God that doeth wonders!"

What further was said that afternoon between the sisters-in-law, so long at enmity, I never learned. Outward things remained the same as before. Frau von

Demphoff never came over here; Aunt Edith never visited the villa; and yet there was a change. In what did it really lie? Who can say? Aunt Edith found again her even, calm manner, that was so sweet and peaceful, and she was tireless in her loving care for Charlotte, and sought in every way to comfort her.

Ferra came, in these short winter days, nearly every day to the old cloister, and, with self-renunciation, sewed on the coarse children's shirts we were making for Christmas; even Gerhardt recognized her efforts with commendatory words. Gerhardt, too, came daily, and chatted with us; and they were the dearest hours that one could imagine.

How heavenly it would have been in the charming Christmas-time but for sorrow's dark shadow! Meanwhile, preparations were being made for Gerhardt's journey, and the nearer the time drew, the more rebellious he became.

"God knows what I am to do with myself over there," he said, fretfully, one day. "I am perfectly well; a matter of caution, declares our old physician—a matter of caution! And what can be more of a bore than traveling about alone, especially when one is fully convinced, as I am, that it is spending money uselessly!"

"Yet, Gerhardt, you must go!" said Charlotte, soothingly. "This is the last time; next year you can remain at home with us."

"Surely, with us?" said Ferra. "Who knows where Lottchen will be next winter?"

"Here!" said Charlotte. "Where should I be?"

Ferra shrugged her shoulders. "Possibly," she said, shortly.

And the Christmas festival grew near—silent, cold, and sad; only for me was there any joy, and for

my darling, who sprang so jubilant from the snow-covered sleigh. A pretty fir-tree was already lighted in Auntie's room. There had grown in all hearts a love for my beautiful boy. Gerhardt came over toward dusk to see the tree, but more to see the delight that sparkled in the dark eyes of the happy child.

The holidays passed like a dream, and before I knew it George was gone again. In his little pocket, however, he carried, with great pride, his school-money, that I had earned sewing and crocheting. Now, Cousin Gerhardt could be spared that extra expense.

"I never go to the confectioner's, Lena, as the other boys," said he, in his pretty, earnest way, "and I write quite small in my diary, so I save paper; and I do not have to pay on the coast-slide—Christiana's uncle lets me slide for nothing."

"You are a dear little fellow, George; but you have your pocket-money for your good reports, and you can buy your cakes on Sunday to eat."

"No, Lena, I am going to save it. Don't you know what I am going to be? I am going to be a hunter and be in the woods all day, so I must have a coat with green capes, and high boots; I have already told Cousin Gerhardt."

A few hours later I heard no more the childish prattle, and on the old cloister lay again silence and sadness. I longed for George, and dreaded Gerhardt's journey. It seemed to me everything would be taken from me then.

CHAPTER XII.

It was a perfect day in January. I sat solitary and alone in Auntie's sitting-room, and was feeling more sad than ever. Aunt Edith had left an hour before to visit her son at Fölkerode; but alone, not with Frau von Demphoff, as had been planned. Over in the villa visitors had come unexpectedly, and detained the ladies at home; so Charlotte could not come to me, and her mother had to give up the drive she was to have taken with Aunt Edith, which she intended doing without the knowledge of her children.

And so Aunt Edith sat alone in the sleigh; that lovely place by her side was empty. My glance rested covetously on the elegant sleigh and its appointments. Auntie had only regretted kindly that I must remain alone, and drove away behind the bells, as if to a frolic. And yet the mother's heart that she carried to her boy was sad.

And as I sat alone and looked out into the glistening, white park, or drew my needle and thread musingly through my work, there came to me so many strange and sorrowful ideas, that I threw away my work and wrapped myself in a warm shawl.

I would go out in the fresh air, or to Gottlieb, or to Jette in the kitchen—anything, rather than stay alone with such gloomy thoughts, such torturing questions as "What is to become of you in the future?" How had I come to meditate on this for the first time? Who can

say? My thoughts were unbidden guests, and they would not be turned away. When Aunt Edith stood before me, ready for her journey, I noticed how old and sick her face looked under the dark-blue hood, and just such a look of weariness lay around my mother's mouth in her last years. Suppose Aunt Edith should die; where should I go then? Over to the villa? It would be dreadful to have to live with Ferra and Aunt Theresa. Stay here? How could I do that alone? I shuddered. How long would it be before George was grown up?

And if Gerhardt should marry? A cry escaped me. It was torture to put that thought before me. I did not wish to think of anyone near him, and yet it would come, and, possibly, before long.

A firm step rang down the corridor, and the next moment Gerhardt stood before me. The blood flew to my face and I could not raise my eyes; an embarrassment hitherto unknown seized me.

"Ah, Cousin, I see you know already!" he said, between joking and earnest. "You have good reason to be ashamed of yourself, so now sit down."

He led me to Auntie's easy-chair by the fire, and sat down opposite me.

"I will read a letter to you which has filled me with the greatest astonishment."

I ventured, shyly, to look at him, but his face was concealed behind the large sheet of paper.

"I am very glad that the little piece of writing reached me in time," he added, before beginning to read:

"DEAR COUSIN:—Enclosed I send back the school-money for the new-year term. It is already paid; Lena earned it. I thank you very much for all your love and kindness; but Lena says you must not pay everything for us, you have already done enough. I began Latin yesterday. Adieu, dear Cousin. Greet Lena, and accept the love of your little COUSIN GEORGE."

He let the sheet fall and looked over at me. There lay something in his blue eyes that was not anger nor joy, something that made my heart beat and that made me turn away from him.

"You are a foolish child, Lena," he said, softly; "and, once for all, I will tell you I will not have your eyes lose their brightness sewing long nights on fine work. I should be seriously angry with Aunt Edith that she did not watch more carefully the little girl with the good, grateful heart, did I not know that all her thoughts now are with her unfortunate son; but now, Lena, how can I go away with a quiet mind when I think you live continually in the foolish idea that you are a burden to me? It will end in my not taking any journey; I will unpack the trunks."

"No, O no!" I cried, frightened.

"No? Shall I go, then?" he asked; "but will you promise me not to accumulate any more capital by night work? Or do you think it would be pleasant to me, when I am roaming about somewhere in the South, to think that here at home——" He broke off suddenly. "Will you promise me to be reasonable, Lena? Now, let us shake hands on it," he said, encouragingly, and held out his hand to me, and as I gave him my hand, embarrassed and hesitatingly, he held it close in his own.

"So; and now I have still a request to make of you. I do not go away with a light heart, Lena, and chiefly on account of Charlotte. She gives me a great deal of anxiety. Should anything happen to her, should she be ill, I pray you to inform me immediately. I have written out my route for you, accurately, and depend upon your goodness. Unfortunately, I can not count on Ferra; she is not observing, and, besides, I do not think she will

remain here during the winter. Charlotte would never complain to mother, and Aunt Edith I do not wish to trouble—will you give me news sometimes?"

"Most willingly," I assured him.

"I thank you in anticipation, Cousin, and the answer —shall I send it to your address?"

"O yes!" I cried, enraptured; "I never received a letter in my life, except from George."

Gerhardt smiled, then drew his note-book from his pocket and took out a leaf.

"First, little Cousin, Lucerne; then the Italian lakes; from Milan to Florence; and finally, Naples. Have you heard anything about the place of which the Italians say, 'When you have seen Naples, die?'"

"Only what I learned in geography," I said, feeling almost mortified.

"I wish you could go with me, Magdalena; it is delightful there; and yet—— Do you know the little song, 'Between France and Bohemia?'"

I shook my head.

"No? Charlotte sings it charmingly; sometime, possibly a happy hour will come to her, then ask her to sing it to you—her voice is peculiarly adapted to this little song."

"Charlotte never sings any more," I cried out, but stopped; dare I say to him that she was far more unhappy than people knew?

"Never any more? Really, Lena? I almost feared it," said Gerhardt. "Yet, Charlotte—she is still so young, one such hurt must heal; it would be unnatural if she remained always in this melancholy condition. I hoped much from a journey for her, but she will not leave Wendhusen, and one does not feel like forcing her now. Time, time must help."

He had been slowly walking up and down the room; now he stood before me.

"Has Charlotte—I think you are confidential with one another—never spoken to you of her love?"

"No; I have seen them together, however," I answered, courageously. Why should he not know it?

"Whom, Cousin?"

"Robert and Charlotte, when they became betrothed."

"Betrothed!" he cried, astonished. "Had it gone so far? When was that, Lena?"

"The evening before the duel."

He was silent for a moment, and seemed buried in thought.

"The poor, poor child!" he said then, in a tone of deepest sympathy. "I had not thought it; I did not believe it had gone so far."

"Disaster rules over the women of our house," he began after a while, and pushed his thick, fair hair back from his forehead. "All sorts of romantic stories have come down to us out of the time long past. Elopements, fleeing to cloisters, unhappy marriages, and even suicide, to which a great-aunt was driven when her lover fell under old Fritz, at Hochkirch. My grandmother used sometimes to relate to us in detail the tragic tale; how they searched for her a dark October night that followed the cruel day, and finally found her, shot through the head. As a soldier's child, she had despised to take poison, or drown herself, and had taken this unusual means, for a woman, to end the life that she could not endure to live without him. And so it has been down to Aunt Edith, and Ferra, and Charlotte. It is strange that no blessing rests on our house. The life of my parents was cold, and devoid of love. Ferra, although her married life was short, was particularly unhappy, because

she loved another, whom she threw over out of caprice. And the poor child Charlotte sees the blood of her brother between herself and her happiness! Truly, one might well be superstitious."

He began again to walk up and down the room.

"Lena," he said, after a pause, stopping in front of me, "what would you do if you had loved some one with your whole heart, and he had been so unfortunate as to have shot your brother George?"

I looked at him, startled, and could find no answer.

"But why should I ask you?" he said, softly; "you could not answer."

"O, I can not say what I would do," I answered; "if I —I think, however, if I were in Charlotte's place, I would go to Robert and say: 'You are unhappy enough, you shall not be made still more so. I belong to you, and whatever the world may say, shall not influence me.'" I spoke with the fullest conviction, and could not conceive in this moment why Charlotte had not done so long ago.

Gerhardt now stood close before me. "Would you do that, Cousin?"

"Yes, for that must be a pitiable, uncertain love that would be turned aside for such a reason. I was lately in the church, and saw the pastor marry a young couple, and heard the solemn service. They vowed to be true to each other, in good and bad days, in need, in death, through all fortunes. And is not the vow that one gives in betrothal just as solemn as before the altar? Suppose Charlotte and Robert had been already married when that misfortune happened; would she have left his house? Would it not have been her duty to have stood by his side, doubly true? No, Cousin, when I thought of him sitting in his solitary house, alone in his pain and grief, I —I do not know whether I could hold out to leave him

without comfort. I do not believe I could, however. O, if I dared to say this to Charlotte, if I——"

I stopped, confused, for in the dusk of the room I saw behind Gerhardt a deathly-white face.

"Charlotte!" I cried, frightened.

Yes, there she stood; we had not heard her enter. She supported herself on the back of a chair, and her eyes almost devoured my face.

"Magdalena," she said, in a low voice, "will you go with me to Fölkerode?"

"Charlotte, do you mean it?" I cried.

She advanced nearer to Gerhardt, with a flush on her sweet face.

"Magdalena is right," she said to him. "I have been faithless, and have forgotten my duty. When he came to me in his despair, I commanded him to leave me, turned from him, instead of comforting him and standing by his side, as the one should have done who only a few hours before had promised to be his wife. I sent him away, because I fancied the blood he had spilled separated us forever. He killed my brother, yes; but was he not forced to do so in self-defense? Did it not happen unintentionally through an unforeseen accident? Robert stands a thousand times nearer my heart than Joachim —what was he to me in life? Nothing. He wickedly played with a human life; because his own was of no worth to himself, he valued no other. Not a single voice in my heart speaks for him; all my thoughts are for him who is as my life. Magdalena is right. Since that hour when I sent him from me, I have said to myself what she has just said aloud, and have wrestled with myself. I would not listen to this voice—and why? Because the words, 'He has killed your brother,' never left me. Because I knew the world would throw up its

hands and cry out against the 'heartless sister.' But I can do no differently, Gerhardt—I can do no differently! Help me, brother, I entreat you!"

She held out her hands to him; her eyes were determined, and in her whole bearing was an unshaken resolution.

Gerhardt took her hands.

"Charlotte, have you thought seriously of what you desire to do?" he said, soothingly. "I am not alone the one to decide in this matter. Would you not painfully grieve your mother, who is in no condition to listen to reason? Think! She was bitterly opposed to Robert; and now—it is impossible, Charlotte. Calm yourself, dear," he said, anxiously. "I feel it is good and right, what you say, but you are unnerved now; we will talk it over coolly when—let us wait a while before deciding."

"My mother?" For a moment a triumphant smile played around her delicate mouth. "O, Gerhardt, if I were as sure of everything as I am that she would approve of my resolve! You do not know her as I do. But if she opposed me with her whole being, I could not do otherwise. I can know no peace until I have seen him. And wait, Gerhardt? Why should I? No!" she cried, "no, Gerhardt; now must I go to him. Do you think I would be so frivolous as to say to him: 'I am here; you have your bride again?' No, between our love's happiness lie dark and heavy clouds, and who can tell when they will lighten? I have not thought so far as that. I would only go to him and show him he has not lost my love. I will only give him a word of comfort, to prove to him that I possess a character that clings fast to that that it believes good and right. This only will bring peace to myself, for a life such as I have led these last weeks—O, it has been horrible! Always to

see before me his sad, white face, when I said, so pitiless: 'We must separate, Robert. Go!' How could I have done it? Gerhardt, only the once—I beg you," she cried, and clung to his arm. He was silent, and looked down on her earnestly. "Then I will go away with you to-morrow, if it must be; only let me see him, Gerhardt. You do not know what it is to lose a happiness that one already held so secure." The large man took the slender form of his sister very tenderly in his arms.

"When would you go?"

But instead of an answer came almost a shriek from the poor, overtaxed heart.

"Now, now, Gerhardt!" rang from her lips, "as quick as I can." He went to the table and brought her a glass of water; then he looked at his watch.

"A quarter to 5; you can be there at 9 o'clock. It is a relief to me to know Aunt Edith is there. But your promise, Charlotte—will you come with me?"

"Yes, yes!" She spoke impatiently. "Wherever you will; only now to him—to Fölkerode."

A quarter of an hour later a sleigh stopped before the gate. Gottlieb sat in his place, and, wrapped in thick furs and robes, Gerhardt helped us in.

"A safe journey," he said, with emotion. "Come back again to-night. You can use Aunt Edith's horses; they will be rested by that time."

I replied to him, for Charlotte was scarcely able to speak.

"I wish I could go with you," he said, regretfully; "but unfortunately it is impossible. I must trust you to Gottlieb—bring them safely back, old man."

"Gerhardt!" said Charlotte, and bent her beautiful face down to him, "I thank you!"

Much moved, he pressed a kiss on her forehead. "Adieu, Charlotte; adieu, Cousin."

The spirited horses started, and away we flew into the darkening night.

It was a calm, clear, winter night. Before us, the level, white land; at our side, in the distance, the snow-crowned mountains. In the west still lay on the horizon the pale gold of the sunset; above us, the stars began to come out one by one. No sound, far or near, but the jingling of our bells, and now and then the cracking of the whip. Here and there lay a town on the way. We saw the lighted windows under the white roofs, and occasionally an angry dog would follow us for a short distance, barking furiously. Then we left the towns behind us, and finally turned into the lonely forest road. Who has not seen a forest in its winter robe of snow, bathed with silvery moonlight till it glistens and sparkles as if strewn with millions of diamonds? It is fairy-land that one can see in our Northern lands, so beautiful it can not be described! A cry of ecstasy escaped my lips.

"O, Charlotte, see how exquisite!" I cried; but she answered absently; only Gottlieb shared my enthusiasm; and so we went, silent, farther and yet farther into the snow-clad forest. It seemed an endless journey, and gradually the cold penetrated through furs and mantle.

"How long before we shall get there?" I inquired, softly, of Gottlieb.

"A half-hour, Fräulein," he replied; and then Charlotte spoke.

"Are we already in the Fölkerode district?" she asked.

"Yes, we entered that some time since, Fräulein Charlotte."

With an "Ah!" she straightened herself up from her inclined position.

"At last!" came from the full heart. "At last, Lena; how good it is! Ah, night after night have I dreamed of driving through these woods to him. O, what blessedness that it is not a dream to-day; that I have freed myself from all considerations, that would smother the noblest, the best that dwells in human hearts—the pure, true love! O, Lena, I am awakened as from a frightful nightmare."

At this moment the sleigh turned into a by-road, and at the end of this road two bright points glimmered through the darkness.

"The forest-house, Fräulein Charlotte," said Gottlieb, reining in the horses. "Shall I drive to it, or will you get out? I think the hounds will make a great ado."

"No, I will get out here," cried Charlotte. "O, I know it all quite well enough from his description."

And in the next moment she had flung back the robe, and with a spring was on the ground.

"I will drive after you slowly," said Gottlieb, helping me out.

I stepped behind Lotta in the narrow path that was trodden in the snow, and the two bright spots grew larger, and the dark outlines of a house appeared from the background of whiteness. It was an imposing building that lay before us in the glimmering moonlight. It was surrounded by giant old trees, which stretched their bare branches protectingly over its white, gabled roof. Broad, massive steps led up to the door, on which the snow-storm, with delicate hand, had traced all the outlines of the heavy carving. Over the door was the true sign of a hunter's home—a splendid pair of antlers; and behind, all the grand old forest; and over all, the brood-

ing silence of the night—no noise, no sound, to remind one of the outside world. A peace, a chaste solitude that was almost overpowering, rested upon this lonely hunter's house. Charlotte stood before the steps. The hood of the fur-lined mantle had slipped half off from the fair hair, and the sweet face in the pale moonlight looked exquisitely lovely peering out from the dark veivet wrap. Her glance hung with unutterable longing on the two bright-lighted windows; she folded her hands over her breast and stood heedlessly in the deep snow.

"There! in there!" she whispered, "Aunt Edith and he——and he——!"

In mute haste, as if every moment counted, she hurried up the steps. The mantle slipped from her shoulders and lay like a dark shadow on the white ground; but she paid no attention to it. Her hand raised the shining knocker and let it fall hard on the metal plate. In the court, the dogs began to bark. With beating heart, I leaned against the iron railing, and closed my eyes.

Then the door opened. A man's voice cried out in the still night:

"Charlotte! Charlotte!"

Never shall I forget that tone, that deep, passionate cry; a whole world of sorrow and joy lay in that simple name. Reddish lamp-light streamed out of the open door, mingling strangely with the bluish glitter of the moonlight. On the threshold stood the slender figure of the young girl; she had bent over and taken in both her hands the head of the man who had sunk down before her; and "Charlotte!" repeated he; yet again, "Charlotte!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Wendhusen was now very lonely. Gerhardt and Charlotte had started on their journey to the South, and Ferra, with her child and its nurse, had gone to Berlin to enjoy at least something of the carnival. Theatres and concerts were in keeping with mourning, she thought, and here the solitude was too trying on one's nerves. Aunt Edith and I in the old cloister, and Frau von Demphoff in the villa, were for the time being the only inhabitants of the great rooms at Wendhusen; and the winter storms of snow and sleet beat upon the old walls. Uniformly came and went the days, and each evening I rubbed out a chalk-mark on my chamber door. Gottlieb had recommended that to me as a sure means of making the time pass faster. The old man himself, even, had made lines on the brown wainscoting of the door.

That was a hard day for me when Gerhardt and Lotta came to say good-bye to us. I could not control myself; I cried like a little girl as Charlotte pressed kiss after kiss on my mouth.

"I will write often, Lena, and you will answer me, won't you?"

I nodded, and looked in her beautiful face. We had been such close friends since that evening in the Fölkerode forest-house. When we drove back, late in the night, to Wendhusen, she had kept her arm around me and called me a thousand caressing names, and poured into

my ear warm, grateful words of thanks. I had been the first to speak what she had been carrying so long in her heart.

"And are you at peace now, Charlotte?" I had then asked.

"O, Lena," she answered, "I can not describe to you how miserable I was, and how different it is now! Do you remember once, in the summer, on one of our walks, how we were overtaken by a fearful storm? You know how the trees bent and swayed till it seemed as if they must be uprooted in the tempest. So it was with me. Just so my heart was beaten upon, and it knew not where to conceal itself, of whom to seek shelter from the wild storms of thoughts and feelings. And then, after a while, when the thunder and lightning had ceased, and only light drops fell upon us—though still the heavens were cloudy, though the sun did not appear, but nevertheless a great breath of relief went through all nature—a peaceful rest—and there came a rent in the clouds and a bit of the blue heavens smiled upon us—so it is with me, Lena; my sun will not shine upon me for many a long day; but the storm has passed, the calm has come, and I saw a little piece of the blue sky. When I heard him call my name, when I looked in the dear, pale face, and read in his eyes what he had suffered in the time of our separation, when I felt what a miracle could be wrought by a few little words spoken in love, I found my peace, Lena, because I did what was my duty."

So now I was looking in her moist eyes.

"I will write as often as you wish, Lena—everything, everything which happens."

Gerhardt's good-bye was remarkable. He walked impatiently up and down the room, and finally he said to

Charlotte, and his voice sounded almost angry, "That is enough of kisses, Sister."

And as she turned around, surprised, he came up to me and reached out his hand in a hurried way, with almost a frown on his face.

"Fare you well, Cousin."

But at the door he turned around again and stopped before me, taking my hand again in his. Charlotte was already outside, and Aunt Edith had followed her.

"Magdalena," he said, softly, "do you remember what you have promised me?"

I bowed my head in assent, and the tears flooded my eyes again.

"You must not weep, little Cousin; what are a few months of separation from—Charlotte? How quickly they will pass; and then—it is no distance at all; one can get here in forty-eight hours, and even less time; you must be comforted by that. Why, it is scarcely worth while saying good-bye. I think in these present days one should not have any solemn farewells. Such tearful parting scenes are most harrowing to me. Now dry your eyes, Lena, and smile before I go, else I shall always see you before me thus."

I tried to smile, but it was a total failure.

"Look at me, Lena," he said, earnestly. I looked up at him, but he looked very indistinct through the thick tears that welled up in my eyes.

"Adieu, Lena," he said, again; "and when I come back you will have once more the pretty curls instead of the ugly braids, will you not?"

Then I had to laugh that he should regret the curls that I had not worn for a long, long time now.

"O, Cousin!" I cried; "then I used to look like a wild gypsy girl."

"Even for that reason," answered he, earnestly; "but who told you so?"

"Ferra," I replied, still laughing.

"So? When spring is here, then they will flutter again about the little head, will they not? I have nothing against the braids now. See, I have accomplished what I was trying for—you are laughing; but now I must go, before it becomes serious again."

And at the same moment the fair head bent down, I felt a kiss on my forehead, so soft and shy as scarcely to be noticed, and "Farewell, Magdalena," whispered his voice in my ear; then, without turning around, he went out of the room.

Amazed, I looked after him, but the door closed behind him. Then I flew to my room and hid my glowing face in the pillow of the old sofa.

I felt as if heaven and earth were joined! I lived in dreams in the days that followed. What went through my young heart I no longer remember to-day, but it was a sweet, blessed time.

For hours I would sit in the window-seat and look out into the park; for hours in the twilight I would sit by the high chimney and watch the flickering flames, while I lovingly stroked the cat on my lap. In the evening lay the atlas on the table, and my finger followed the travelers on the map, while my fancy painted the Swiss Alps and the Italian landscape.

Aunt Edith gave me entire freedom, loving and sweet to me as always, and spoiling me as if I were a little princess. She was so unselfish, the tender, sorely tried woman; and since that evening that Charlotte so unexpectedly entered Robert's house, had come back again the old trust and thankfulness.

"See, child," she said, that same evening, to me; "it

must have ended so, else both would have gone to ruin. You have no idea in what a desperate condition I found Robert only two hours before. Thank God, he has again found courage to live his life." And in her gratitude she could not do enough, she felt, toward caring for and helping others. Anyone who bore a sorrow in his heart, found comfort in her; the sick, the poor, found help and counsel. With no thought for herself, she gave her life for others.

Between Aunt Edith and Ferra there was a very uncomfortable scene before the departure of the latter.

At first, Ferra had intended to remain at Wendhusen, so at least she said, when she came over to the cloister in a very ill-natured mood, one day. She felt it her duty to do so, as she had promised Gerhardt; but some one else must be present, for since Joachim's death there was no having a reasonable word with mamma.

She would lock herself in her room for a half day at a time, and when she would come to the table at noon, she had neither eyes nor ears for her—Ferra—nor for the sweet, little boy that was so cunning now with his childish prattle. So, as she had received a very urgent invitation from a very dear friend, which she really could not decline graciously, she had decided to leave the next day. Gerhardt would approve of her resolution, she felt assured. She should write him as soon as she reached Berlin.

"There will be nothing else for him to do," laughed Aunt Edith. "However, I believe also that Gerhardt will be very willing for you to have a little change, Ferra. Only I think, if Theresa—your mother"— she corrected herself—"is suffering so, it would be well if one of her children remained near her, in case she——"

"Should be ill!" volunteered Ferra. "But, Aunt,

mamma ill, with her robust health? I will wager with you, as high as you will, that mamma will outlive us all—Gerhardt, Charlotte, and me. Joachim was the only one who inherited her iron constitution, which unfortunately wasn't of much use to him. The idea of mamma being ill! She who has no idea what nerves are, she never had an ache in her finger!"

"As you think best," said Aunt Edith, quietly; "you must know where your duty lies."

"Certainly, I know," said Ferra, rapidly; "my duty is to myself and my child. My nerves are completely unstrung since that catastrophe with Joachim. I gave up my trip that I planned before Christmas, on Gerhardt's account; now I feel I can not let it go any longer. I must consult a physician."

Aunt Edith looked wonderingly upon the young woman. How changed she was in a short time! Where was the soft, caressing manner, which so lately had charmed every one?

"I must further confess," she continued, and the red of indignation colored the beautiful face, "I consider it very wrong of Gerhardt to go to Italy. If it has not been necessary for him to go before, it is now quite superfluous. He preaches the entire day, we must economize! 'Economize' has become our watchword; I wonder he has not had it put over the entrance to the villa as a device. But in spite of all that, he has undertaken this journey; and that was not enough—no, Lotta must go with him; Lotta is unhappy, something must be done for her. I must say that her good sense would have kept her at home; but she was over-persuaded, and in spite of economy she had to go, and why? Only because she looked a little pale, and was more quiet than usual, for which I thanked God daily. Her hoidenish manners

were insupportable. Gerhardt had no thought whether I needed recreation. It would not have done *me* any harm to go to Italy."

"You are wrong, Ferra," interrupted Aunt Edith for the first time. "That Gerhardt has taken the death of his brother, and the circumstances connected with it, very hard, every one can see; until now, no one spoke with such conviction of Gerhardt's illness as yourself; and now that he has been persuaded to do something for himself, you are exciting yourself in a very unnecessary way. That, moreover, Charlotte gave us cause for serious consideration, you can hardly deny."

Ferra laughed. "Dearest Aunt, you will not take any part against Gerhardt or Lotta; that would be unheard of," she said, vivaciously. "Please do not believe, however, that Ferra von Riedingen does not remark what goes on about her! I know very well what is the matter with Charlotte; but you can not make me believe that one dies of love-sickness."

Aunt Edith's pale face flushed with agitation.

"Certainly not, Ferra." She spoke excitedly, and laid her work on the table. "Because your superficial nature has no conception of real love."

"But, Aunt Edith, I beg!" replied Ferra, more astonished than angry. "Now you are unjust. That one does not die from disappointed love, you can see by me."

"Do not explain your words or twist around what you have said," cried Aunt, commandingly, so that Ferra, who had never heard such a tone from the gentle woman, was silent.

"I will not suffer a spiteful word to be said against Charlotte," she continued, angrily, "for she stands a thousand times higher than you, with your miserable egotism! Believe, that the old woman here before you

has seen through your actions for a long time. I know the object of every one of your acts. You understand me—I see it in your manner—and so it is unnecessary to say the hard words to your face that I have for you—only these: Your work, your self-denial, was in vain—that you can rest assured of."

"I do not know what you mean!" stammered Ferra, with tears in her eyes. "You are all so unkind to me, so unfriendly, and I do no harm to anyone."

She stepped over to Aunt, and the charming face looked very entreating.

"Tell me what it is you find to complain of in me?" she begged. "Ah! it is quite possible I am a little selfish sometimes; Riedingen quite spoiled me."

Aunt Edith looked at her without a word. She had evidently expected an angry, impatient answer; but the eel-like nature twisted and turned, and, like a scolded, repentant child, it lay, as it were, at her feet praying for forgiveness.

"See, dearest Auntie, I do not mean any harm," she continued, caressingly, "when I say Charlotte will not die of her love troubles. Since she was so inconsiderate as to conceive an affection for Robert, there would have been an unavoidable contest, for mamma would never have consented to a marriage; so God has interfered just at the right time, before the love became deep—while it was yet unspoken. Now she must and will conquer it. See, that was what I meant. Pray do not be angry with me; it makes me so unhappy."

"O, Ferra!" said Aunt Edith, and drew away her hand from the young woman, who was about to carry it to her lips; "I could weep over you." And, picking up a bunch of keys, she went with energetic step out of the room.

Ferra looked after her; she had a handkerchief in her

hand, and scarcely had the door closed behind the old lady before she threw herself into the nearest chair, and, pressing her handkerchief before her face, began to weep bitterly. "Dear Magdalena," she said, after a while, straightening herself up and looking up at me with wet eyes, "you do not know how unhappy I feel; no one understands me here. I am a stranger among my own, and where I think to find sympathy and forbearance, there is only mistrust."

I was embarrassed, and could find no answer. The elegant, beautiful woman, even in her tears, did not seem to be in need of sympathy. Some way, something was lacking in her grief; what it was, at that moment I could not tell; later I knew—it was truth.

"When I was your age," she continued, "I lived through a great disillusion, and when, a few years later, I believed I had conquered myself, and, full of confidence, gave Riedingen my hand, then——"

And then followed a description of her unfortunate life that drove the hot blood to my cheeks. It was the picture of a modern marriage, in which the man, a notorious debauchee, insulted and disgraced the poor, sincerely loving wife in every conceivable manner.

"I was at that time tempted to make an end of my life," she concluded.

"But you had your child, your little child," I cried, wanting to say something to her.

"Yes, my sweet darling; but he was so little I could not complain to him of my pain and misery. O, Lena, consider well," she continued, playing nervously with the jet beads of her necklace, "before you give hearing to a wooer. I should have been a thousand times happier if I had never married! One loves, one becomes a slave, one bears all humors with inexhaustible patience, and

earns only ingratitude. Everything that one as a girl beautifully dreamed and hoped, goes under in the revolting selfishness of our lords and masters. And men are all alike, all; I despise the whole sex."

"That is not true, Ferra," said Aunt Edith, coolly, who had heard the last words as she entered; "God be thanked that there are exceptions. I pray you, do not share your experiences with that young thing there. She will form an entirely wrong impression from such circumstances."

"All men are egotists," repeated Ferra, with gentle insistence, only her eyes flashed as they rested upon Aunt Edith. "My husband was, so was yours; all are, on this round globe; and Gerhardt, your much-admired Gerhardt, is one of the most prominent of the species. Forgive me, dear Aunt, that I speak this truth aloud to those innocent ears; but she can not be kept forever in ignorance. I deplore, however, that I continually excite your condemnation to-day, dear Aunt. I pray you to forgive me, and forgive me also that in spite of your disapproval I shall go to Berlin; when I come back it is to be hoped my nerves will not be so irritable."

She took her cloak, and, bending over Aunt Edith's hand, made her adieu, giving me a cool, friendly nod, and left the room.

"Ferra is a deplorable character. She has never understood how to be satisfied with what she possessed. Discontentment makes life a torment, and drives one to commit follies," said Aunt Edith, when we were left alone.

She took up her knitting-work again, opened a romance of Walter Scott, and buried herself, without wasting further words, in "The Antiquary." She evidently wished to show me how little attention she paid to Ferra's reasoning.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ferra had been gone already nearly four weeks, and February was approaching its end. Aunt had visited Robert twice, but he had not been here; it was not possible, at present. He had said to Charlotte, that night, he never wished to see Wendhusen again, and he could not endure the thought of it. The last time when Aunt Edith was to drive to Fölkerode, and Gerhardt's team stood before the gate—for Gottlieb's old cloister horse was no longer equal to the long way—and I was running behind her with the foot-muff and covers to tuck around her to protect her from the windy weather, I saw her stop and step back as she raised her foot to get into the carriage. There on the silver-gray silken cushions sat Frau von Demphoff, and she stretched her hands out to her sister-in-law to help her in.

"I am going with you to-day, Edith," she said, quietly; "or shall I trouble you?"

Aunt did not answer, but stared into the pale face of the woman who had frightfully changed within a few weeks. There were blue circles around the deep-set gray eyes, and the lines of the face had become sharp, as of a woman past seventy.

"Theresa, you are ill," said Aunt Edith, softly; "ought you to go?"

"Yes," came back, quickly, the response; "it is on that account I wish to go. Who knows if I shall ever be anything else. You are right, I am ill; but it is nothing new—I have been so for a long time."

As Aunt sat down beside her, I leaned into the carriage to wrap the carriage-robe around their feet; and as I did so, I offered to Frau von Demphoff a shy good-day. I always felt timid before her. She did not reply to me, but she bent down and looked in my face. It was a strange, deep glance—a glance that went through my eyes to my soul. Her lips moved lightly, but no word came, only it seemed to me as if the cold stare in her eyes gradually faded away, and mild, friendly beams took its place.

But it was only for a moment; then she settled herself back in the seat, and the carriage rolled away. In the bend of the road, Aunt Edith looked back and nodded to me. When she came home, late in the evening, she took me tenderly in her arms, and kissed me again and again.

"Robert sent greetings to you," she said; "and the beeches have buds—it is spring in the forest."

"O, spring!"

In the spring they will come back again from the far country where it is always green, and the flowers ever bloom. Charlotte writes that one in Germany can not know how wonderful it all is there, and yet she had a continual longing. What is all the brilliant coloring of the South in comparison with a German beech woods! The whole marvelous glory of bloom vanished at the thought of the cool, dark forest at home.

Ah, I knew it well; her whole heart was in the forest —right in the middle of the forest.

She wrote often, as she promised to do; and there was always a greeting from Gerhardt in the letter, but never a line from his hand. What had he to write? Charlotte was there with him; he did not need to ask how she was. I was almost angry; I had childishly rejoiced and counted on his letters.

The chalk-marks on my door grew less and less; now there were only forty—forty long days before they would come home.

Outside raged the spring storms over the mountains, bringing a sharp, invigorating breath.

The March sun burnt hot on the sandstone steps of the old cloister threshold, and peeped through the white curtains. It was bright in the great, comfortable room, and Auntie's windows were filled with delicate-tinted hyacinths.

In the Abbess House, however, the windows were all wide open; the pure, crisp spring air blew through the cold, damp rooms that had been closed through the winter; and one could see Gottlieb's old face look out now and then from the stone window-frames.

With childish joy, I observed every sign of the coming spring; and as I waited I was filled with feverish unrest, and wandered about, sometimes in the garden, sometimes in the park, and then through the house, following after Gottlieb much more than he wished, as he was at work in the Abbess House, running from room to room, asking about everything, and, wherever possible, making him tell me some interesting tale.

"How could one go out of such a grand old house to live in a modern dwelling!" I cried. And, in fact, one felt the power, grandeur, and dignity of the great, broad rooms, with their old-fashioned furniture of massive elegance; and the modern villa, with its light effects, seemed poor and insignificant.

"Yes, child"—Gottlieb sometimes called me child when I was alone with him—"my lady began head over heels to build as soon as the Herr died, although there was an abundance of room here. She called the villa her widow's residence, thinking, of course, that Herr Gerhardt one

day would bring a young mistress here. Well, he has not married, but the villa is there."

I looked around, almost with fear. At this moment it almost seemed as if over there in that dusky room, under the glistening candelabra, the future young mistress—Gerhardt's wife—glided over the shining parquet.

"It may yet be, Gottlieb," I said, in a low voice.

"Eh, what! gracious Fräulein," replied the old man, and pushed up a blind that let a flood of sunshine into the gloomy room, lighting up the gold borders of the dark tapestry. "Herr Gerhardt will not marry; if we wait for that, then——"

The rest was drowned in the noise he was making thumping the red-silk divan; but I caught the name Frau von Riedingen between the blows, and Gottlieb looked as if he had a very naughty child under his hands that he was punishing with a good will.

"It is a pity," he said, stopping for breath, "when one deserves a good wife, as Herr Gerhardt—there, I have finished here. I will let it stand open till this evening. Go out of the draught, child; I am going to open those outside doors," he nodded to me.

Whenever he looked at me there would come a mild, friendly gleam in his fine, blue-gray eyes that hardly suited the strong expression of the rugged old face. It was like the glint of the autumn sun through the almost leafless trees.

I walked back through the room, which was furnished with every comfort; but the splendid bronze clock on the chimney had been silent for years. The half-burned wax candles in the girandoles had become yellow and soiled, and the spiders had woven their webs over the carved wooden frame of the high mirror. Gottlieb fol-

lowed me, and deliberately locked the last door behind him. Then he took another key in his hand.

"Now into the lodging-rooms," he said, and went upstairs into the corridor and unlocked one of the high doors, which opened with a creak. I followed without much thought of what I was doing. It was a little room, with green-and-gold embroidered tapestry and a white marble mantel-piece. The silk curtains of the only window were half drawn. In an alcove stood a canopied bed; the white pillows were thrown on in disorder, and a quilt hung carelessly over the side, touching the floor. On the marble top of a round table that stood in front of a sofa lay numerous things, as if just placed there—an ink-stand, a pen-holder, paper with monogram, and envelopes; hair-brushes, gloves, smelling-bottle, and playing-cards. There were several books on the little table by the bed, a riding-whip on the carpet; and over the back of a chair hung a dark uniform coat with bright orange-yellow collar and cuffs; over all hung a faint odor of patchouly.

"Joachim's room!" I screamed out, seized with a nameless fear as I was brought face to face with the possessions of the man whose life had been brought to so sudden a close.

Gottlieb stood motionless and looked about the room. "I wouldn't have believed it," he murmured, stooping and picking up the whip. "They turned the key in the door, and no one has cared to look after it since. Everything is just as he left it when he went out that morning. They must have all lost their heads."

And the old man began industriously to put the room in order, like a chamber-maid, and great drops ran down the wrinkled face.

"Ah, God! when one has seen it so from his boyhood

up," said he, after a while, shutting a half-open drawer in the commode, after putting its contents in order; "and now think how it has turned out! Fräulein, there is nothing so hard as when one's own flesh and blood dies! Every evening, when I close my eyes, if I will, I can see him lying before me with the deathly-pale face; and then I can see Herr Robert as I drove him to town that evening, when he gave himself up to justice. Fräulein Lena, I never thought that a man could weep so bitterly; but when he gave me his hand, and I was about to turn back to Wendhusen, he fell on my neck and held me to him as if I were his own father, and he began to weep, and I—truly, little one, tears do not come easy from me," he quickly brushed his hand over his eyes; "but it was the pity I felt. I could not help it, it was more than I could bear; and Fräulein Charlotte, she drooped like a flower broken from its stem!"

I could not speak; the whole terrible catastrophe came clearly before me with painful vividness. Stupefied, I watched the old man as with trembling hands he hung up in the wardrobe the uniform of the handsome, gay young officer.

"Only for the present," he said, as if in apology. "When the master comes back he can decide what is to be done with the things. I know now how it happens that everything has remained in such chaos Herr Gerhardt took his brother's pocket-book out of here. It was the next evening, I brought the light for him; then he bolted the door to the next room from the inside and locked this door here. God knows it is no wonder it was frightful to him to come in here. Probably he thought it was put in order long ago, for he knew I had the keys. These things on the table give me a strange feeling, as if one had just been sitting there and writing.

That must not be, it might give some one a great fright; and, gracious Fräulein, will you close that letter portfolio, I would rather not handle it; and this must belong in it!"

He stooped and picked up a small leaf from the floor and observed it attentively. It was a half-written letter, on heavy, cream-laid paper. Above, in the middle of the sheet, was the delicately written autograph signature, "F. v. R."

I reached out my hand for it, but Gottlieb paid no attention; his face had become dark-red, and he hastily concealed the paper in his breast-pocket.

"That is nothing for you, Fräulein Lena; I will give the letter to Frau Berka, or, better yet, to the master himself."

Then he muttered some angry words between his teeth and stalked furiously out of the room. He must have read something very exciting to forget me as he did, for he came very near locking me in the room.

I took Joachim's portfolio and ran hastily down the corridor to give it to Aunt Edith, thankful to escape from the uncomfortable room.

CHAPTER XV.

But I could not find Aunt Edith, and as I came breathless into the kitchen, Jette informed me that Frau von Demphoff's maid had been there and Aunt Edith had gone back to the villa with her; that Aunt Theresa was ill, and that Aunt Edith had been trying to find me.

I snatched up a shawl, ran down the length of the corridor, out of doors, and entering the road to the villa, ran as fast as I could over the wet ground. Almost at the same time with me, a little, plump woman reached the villa, the wind whirling her black dress about her like wings. She stood still, as if rooted to the spot. As I came rushing up to her, her glance rested with an expression of measureless astonishment upon me; but to-day I had no eyes for her. What interest had I in Anna? Quietly, I walked past her up the stairway, and, looking back, I saw her turn down the hall on the first floor, to Ferra's room.

In the carpeted corridor, upstairs, stood the letter-carrier's boy, always so welcome; and, as he saw me, he felt around in his pocket, and drew out a letter which he handed to me.

"So, gracious Fräulein, that saves my going to the cloister." Then he put on his cap and left me.

My eyes flew over the address. "From Gerhardt!" I cried aloud; I knew the peculiar, large characters; how often had Aunt Edith sent wood-tickets, direct from his hand, to her poor!

The blood stormed through my heart as in a confused dream. I looked at the large, four-cornered envelope, forgot for the moment where I was and what I did, and, before I knew it, I had pressed my lips to the paper. I stood with my back turned to the stairs. It was very still around me; but not so still that I now heard the light rustle of a woman's dress, and, as I turned around, I saw the little black figure scarcely two steps from me, and her blue eyes took in sharply the letter in my hand, so I involuntarily thrust it into my bosom, and stepped to one side.

She went past me, and vanished through the door that led to Frau von Demphoff's room, as calmly as if she still belonged to the household. The next moment, however, she came out again, with a dark-red face, and almost ran the length of the corridor and down the stairs, and I heard the glass door of the vestibule clang to behind her.

Now I tore out my letter, but only a few lines met my eye:

"NAPLES, March 8, 18—.

"For over two weeks we have had no letter from my mother! You promised me, Magdalena, to write to me of Charlotte's condition—dare I hope that you will fulfill your promise also in this case? Charlotte is very anxious, and I no less so. Now, sit down at Aunt Edith's writing-desk, take the pen in your hand, and write a few lines, and do not dare to forget to add how everything is going in the old cloister, and if a certain little Fräulein is obedient, and puts out her light at the right time. Unfortunately, in your letters to Charlotte, I have found no information on this point. We have a longing for Wendhusen, in spite of all the splendor of sun and warmth. 'Only for Germany does my heart long,' as Lottchen sings for me, at my entreaty. Yet, the snow still lies on our mountains, and the wind blows cold; but in a few weeks, so I hope, we can pack our trunks! Pray God, that we may find again in Wendhusen all that we left there when we deserted it.

"Send an answer soon, Magdalena. It is to be hoped our anxiety about mamma is only a fancy. Charlotte sends her warmest love, as does your GERHARDT.

"P. S.—I have received a letter from George."

That was all. For a moment I looked down on the broad, white page, disappointed at the brief contents. Then I went softly into the next room; through that, into Frau von Demphoff's *salon*, the same room in which I first stood before her, homesick and trembling before her cold glance. There hung Ferra's portrait, in the same place, above the plants; Joachim's picture, however, was covered with a black curtain. From the adjoining room sounded subdued voices, and now and then a groan from pain. The *portières* were let down. I could hear distinctly Aunt Edith's soothing tones.

"I will not have Ferra come," I recognized the hard, energetic voice of the sick woman; "I wish to be alone, only alone."

Timidly I went to the curtained door. "Aunt!" I ventured to call. The anxious face of the housemaid looked through the parted folds.

"Will you ask my Aunt to step here a moment?" I asked, and she came directly. I showed her Gerhardt's letter, which she quietly read through; then she gave it back to me, and returned to the room.

"Theresa, would you like Gerhardt to come?" she asked, in a kind, sympathetic voice.

"No," came back the weary reply, "nobody, nobody; even if I should be worse. Do you hear, Edith?—no one."

Aunt Edith came back again.

"Do not reply to the letter, dear, until the doctor has been here."

"Can I help in any way, Auntie?"

'Not now, my darling; come again toward evening. I am almost afraid it will be a nervous fever."

I went back to the cloister, and there I sat until after sunset, with Gerhardt's letter in my hands, reading the lines over and over, even to the two last words in conclusion, "Your Gerhardt!"

Before the name Gerhardt was a large *C.* This letter was crossed out. He had begun to write Cousin, "Cousin Gerhardt," and had changed his mind.

But why? I used to call him Cousin; but still I found it quite right; it sounded a thousand times nicer, "Your Gerhardt," than "Cousin Gerhardt." I would never again call him anything but "Gerhardt." What wonderfully delicious things traveled through my head in that quiet hour. Everything that had depressed me, the burden I had been carrying, which weighed upon me so at times, slipped entirely off, and for the first time my young heart was flooded with sunshine so blinding that I had to close my eyes before its glow; and outside, the budded branches of the linden knocked on the windowpane. The spring will soon be here!

Finally I remembered that I promised Aunt Edith to go back to the villa. Slowly I rose to my feet; I would infinitely have preferred to sit there and dream. I stopped in the corridor, before our kitchen door. Jette was singing at the spinning-wheel. How often had I heard it, and scarcely listened to the melancholy folk-song; but now the words arrested my attention. Yes, that was the song that Gerhardt wrote of:

"Only for Germany does my heart long."

I leaned against the cold wall and listened to the melody. After a little pause the fresh, young voice began again:

" There is a land called Italy,
Where oranges and citrons bloom.
Sing! said the Roman maid,
And I sang of our Northern land.
Only in Germany, only in Germany,
There shall my sweetheart dwell."

The hot blood rushed to my face; I literally flew out of the house into the cool garden, and, breathless, I arrived at the villa. There I found everything in commotion; the condition of the sick woman was much worse. At the desk in the *salon* sat the old physician, writing a prescription. A dish of ice lay on the carpet before the blue *portières*, which moved back and forth as in a strong draught.

"Where is Aunt Edith?" I asked the maid, who was hurrying through the room.

"Here, Fräulein Lena. You need not walk lightly; Frau Demphoff is out of her head."

I went into the room. The luxurious room seemed filled with solemnity, which reflected on the silken curtains of the canopied bed; the curtains were thrown back wide, that the cold air which streamed in from the open window could circulate about the bed and reach the feverish face that rested on the white pillows with half-closed eyes.

Aunt Edith stood at the bedside, laying a fresh cold compress on the head of the invalid.

The carpet deadened the sound of my steps. She heard me first when I stood beside her, and looked around in a startled way.

"Go out immediately, Lena," she said, authoritatively; "this is a contagious disease."

"No, dear Auntie, let me stay. I am young, healthy, and strong; you will surely have rheumatism in this cold room."

"Never mind that, child; the young catch infectious diseases quicker than the old—go!"

"No!" I said, decidedly.

The woman who lay there was Gerhardt's mother, and he was worried about her. How could I go away?

"Lena!" Aunt Edith's good face was red with anger at my obstinacy.

"I will not go!" I repeated again, and took from her the compress that she was going to lay on the ice. "Do you think I can not nurse the sick?"

"I do not doubt that, you willful child; but I know Gerhardt would never forgive me if I let you run such a risk."

"Gerhardt is very anxious about his mother; I must answer him. What shall I write?" I asked, evasively. "What does the doctor say?"

"He is not willing that he shall be sent for, on Charlotte's account; she is not yet recovered. So write to him that his mother is well, but not in the mood to write, or whatever excuse you choose; only go out of here, I beg you."

"By no means, Aunt Edith," I replied; and turning to the doctor, who just at that moment entered, I said, entreatingly, "I am right to stay, am I not?"

The old man looked kindly at me.

"Accept help, Frau Berka; this will not be ended to-day or to-morrow."

And with a sigh Aunt Edith suffered me to take her place, and quickly and regularly to change the compresses.

Aunt Demphoff talked continually softly to herself; there was something very uncomfortable in the half-darkened room. Sometimes she would call out a loud word, and each time Aunt Edith would come in with anxious mien.

"It is not true," whispered Aunt Demphoff. "Who saw it? Robert! Robert! and if they all say it, I—I will not believe it."

And then, loud and strong:

"Bring me the girl! bring her to me, Gerhardt; I will love her!" Aunt Edith shook her head as she listened.

"She is delirious, child; go to the other side of the room. You need not hear it."

But I remained where I was. It seemed as if I was chained to the bed of the fever-crazed woman.

As the night came on, the patient quieted. Aunt Edith lay on the lounge, where she could overlook the bed, and the maid slept in the easy-chair; she had watched the night before.

"At last Frau Demphoff would not lie down at all," she related to us.

Outside, a mighty storm was raging and roaring through the tall trees of the park. I listened to its harsh song. Whence had it come? Softly I stepped into the *salon* and opened a window. A warm breath met me; it was the south wind that thawed the snow on the mountains. Possibly, it had come hither over Italian fields.

"Have you not seen Gerhardt?" I asked, half aloud, and bent far out into the storm, which tossed my hair wildly about my face; and through all the *furor* sounded a melody clear as a bell in my ear:

"There is a land called Italy,
Where oranges and citrons bloom.
Only in Germany, only in Germany,
There shall my sweetheart dwell."

O, if one could only fly over the mountains, far, far out into the land to the distant South! If the time would only go as fast as the storm!

But the time dragged on so slowly, so torturingly.

Would it never be day in the sick-room? And when the first rays of the morning sun lightened the shadows of the gloomy place, Aunt Edith sat with tearful eyes beside the bed, holding the hands of the sufferer. What a fearfully tortured human heart was revealed by the disconnected words that came from the parched lips! The maid was sent out of the room, and Aunt Edith consented to let me help her.

"Edith! Edith, forgive me!" cried out the invalid. "I loved him so—I wanted to be everything to him. Were you in Fölkerode? I was there, too. How pale he looks, the poor boy—my darling, my Robert. What is it you lack? You shall have anything, what you will, only do not look at me so; I can not bear it. Joachim, leave me; I have nothing more—nothing, nothing!" she shrieked out, and struck her hand on the quilt. "Everything is gone, except the diamond button of your father's; that belongs to Gerhardt."

And so passed the morning. The servants stole about on tiptoe, and there were pale, anxious faces everywhere. The doctor came, and I asked again if Gerhardt should not be informed.

"Let him be where he is, little Fräulein," replied the old Herr. "With God's help, we will bring her through; and if the worst comes, there is the telegraph. Above all things, do not get Frau von Riedingen here; I had her once at a sick-bed, and I really thought she would be the death of Gerhardt."

Toward 3 o'clock I went over to the cloister. Gerhardt must have his answer, and I must lie to him in my first letter! But what did it matter? So, as calmly as I could, I wrote that everything was going on well in Wendhusen—everything in the best of order; that Frau von Demphoff, in Aunt Edith's opinion, was only

"out of sorts;" that we were all well in the cloister—the "certain little Fräulein" and the cats—and that at 10 o'clock the whole household were sweet and fast asleep, if the storm did not roar too loud around the building; that the snow still lay on the mountains, and Gottlieb still had to put great beech logs on the fire, but that the snowbells were putting out their first tender shoots, and in the cloister garden all the trees were in full bud.

How many times I read over the letter before I put it in the envelope!

I was very confident it would not be complete without a postscript; so that grew to be longer than the letter itself, It was no wonder that my first letter was somewhat of a failure. I had learned at school to very correctly compose a letter to an imaginary person, but to-day I forgot all that, and one thought chased another pell-mell—I was writing to Gerhardt. Finally it was sealed with mamma's little seal-ring that I had inherited; now the address, and then Jette must carry it to the post. A mischievous smile stole over the girl's pretty face as I laid, with a sigh, my letter in her hand. I could think of so many things I wished I had written, but it was too late now; and besides I must hasten back to the villa, and relieve Aunt Edith at the sick-bed.

As I stepped into the vestibule, the voice of a child crying struck my ear from the hall.

"Dear mamma! dear mamma!"

A woman's voice tried in vain to comfort it. Wondering, I drew near. Trunks, satchels, hat-boxes, in great disorder, lay on the floor, and among them kneeled the nurse of little Kurt, trying to soothe the child, who was still in his fur-trimmed coat.

"Kurt, dearest, are you here?" I cried, hurrying to the little one.

"Kurt is cold; Kurt wants to go to grandmamma," wept the child; and in fact it was bitter cold here.

"Poor little fellow!" I said, pityingly, picking him up. "When did Frau von Riedingen come?"

"Just this moment," replied the nurse. "We drove in an open carriage. Madame went directly up to Frau von Demphoff; I can not leave the child alone, else——"

"Does Frau von Riedingen know her mother is ill?" I asked.

"Certainly," said the modest little French woman. "Madame packed neck over heels. We were ready in half an hour after the dispatch came; we have traveled all night."

"A dispatch? Who has telegraphed?"

"I believe Mademoiselle Anna," she answered.

"I will send someone to you with warm milk," I said to the child, putting him down; and, meeting a servant on the stairs, I gave the order, and went on up to the sick-room. As I entered, I heard Ferra's voice in the ante-room.

"I pray you, dear Aunt, to confide the care of mamma to me. It is very noble in you to come here, in spite of all that has happened between you; in fact, I never expected, best of aunts, to ever see you in these rooms again. You must have noticed how I shrank from you as if I had seen a ghost. You have an angel's heart, dearest of aunts; but think how vexed she would be, when she came to consciousness, and——"

I came into the *salon* during the last words. Ferra had taken off her fur coat and hat, and was tying around her a big, white apron. Heaven knows where she could have got it, in such a short space of time.

"So I will now go in, Aunt, and I thank you again for what you have done."

"Your mother, Ferra, has expressed the desire that I should be at her sick-bed," said Aunt Edith, quietly.

"Mamma? Impossible, Aunt! No; there is a mistake somewhere—an inconceivable error."

"By no means, Ferra;" and now Auntie smiled a little.

"Then it was the ravings of fever, Aunt. You will not make me believe that my strong, inflexible mother could so suddenly overcome her antipathy of nearly thirty years."

"She herself can not give you any explanation at present, Ferra; you will have to be patient, at least for the particulars on this point, until your mother is well."

Ferra looked at the speaker in amazement.

"I do not know—in fact, Aunt Berka——" she stuttered.

But Aunt continued: "I think you ought to know, Ferra, that this illness is contagious."

Ferra turned her beautiful face to Aunt, listening intently.

"My God! what ails mamma? Probably a nervous trouble?"

"Your mother has typhoid fever, Ferra."

"Typhoid! that dreadful illness where all the hair comes out?" she cried, filled with affright; and, stepping back, "O, heavens! the typhoid is contagious. Melanie von Stelten was perfectly bald after that terrible sickness! Why, Aunt, this is horrible!"

She clasped her hands in a helpless way; it looked as if she were ready to fly out of the room, if she could only find some mask for her cowardice.

"It is to be hoped you will not insist upon carrying out your will," said Aunt Edith, seriously. Only a slight drawing of the upper lip showed how well she understood managing her handsome niece. "You must think

of your little child," she continued; "we concealed this illness from you for that reason."

"You are right, dear Aunt," deplored the young woman; "situated as I am, I do not dare—— O, my mamma! my poor mamma!" She untied the white apron; then, as she turned to the door, she discovered me.

"O, Lena, how sorrowful is our meeting!"

"Your little one is crying down-stairs, Cousin," I said; "he is chilled in the unheated room, and—you had better not kiss me; I have been all night and this morning in the sick-room." Hastily Ferra stepped back.

"I must see after the child, if I really can be of no service here," she declared, already half behind the *portière;* "but be sure," she turned her head back again, "if you need my help, to——"

"Very well," nodded Aunt Edith, and Ferra vanished.

A peculiar smile lay on the face of the old lady.

"What brought Ferra here in such haste?" she asked me.

"Anna telegraphed to her, Auntie," I replied, and was hurrying past her to go into the sick-room.

"Stop!" she said, and stood with outstretched arms before the door; "just one serious word: under no consideration will I allow you to remain here; besides, this evening a nurse is coming. I dare not consent to your staying here, for I promised Gerhardt to care for you and your health, and I will not take the responsibility of risking this infectious disease."

"Auntie," I cried, throwing my arms around her neck, "Gerhardt will not be angry, I know; it is his mother that I want to care for."

"That does not matter; you must go."

"But——"

"No but; in five minutes you must be out of this room."

Almost weeping, I went. What should I do over there, alone, in the old cloister? As I went down the stairs I heard Ferra's scolding voice.

"It was absurd in you to telegraph me, and frighten me to death!"

A servant was carrying some tea and light refreshment into the room, and through the opening of the door I saw Anna standing before the young woman.

"I suppose you can at least tell me," she continued, still more angry, "what I want to know. I have seen that they are up there; but how came——"

CHAPTER XVI.

I hurried out and away, as fast as I could, to the cloister, and went back and forth restlessly through the rooms. It was so lonely here; only Minka kept me company and walked along behind me, and looked at me as if she would ask where her mistress was.

I would so gladly, so willingly, have stayed over there with his mother! And, as the darkness of night came on, I could not contain myself any longer, and again ran back to the villa. Ferra's windows were brightly lighted. In the vestibule, Frau von Demphoff's maid came toward me.

"How is it above?" I asked her.

"Worse! gracious Fräulein. She raves and shrieks till one can hear her all over the house. The doctor is going to stay all night, and the nurse has come. Do not go up, Frau Berka has forbidden it; under no circumstances were you to go in."

I turned around, sad and depressed. Should I go back to the cloister? No, I could not stay there alone; and before I really knew what I did, I was standing in Ferra's room. It was warm and comfortable in the small but elegant apartment, with its pale-blue decorations. Dainty chairs stood around a small marble table; a thick, richly-hued carpet covered the floor; in the corners of the room were grouped tropical plants and azaleas, and out of the luxuriant foliage gleamed marble figures; the whole bathed in the softened light from the shaded lamp swinging from the ceiling.

I opened wide my eyes. It was the first time that I had seen Ferra's "widow's refuge;" the first glimpse I had ever had of the apartments of a fashionable woman.

Charlotte's room was so different—so simple, so girlish, with its rose-flowered cretonne furniture and hangings; the sewing-stand by the window; the flowering plants on the balcony, from which the little birds came so confidingly and hopped about on the sill, picking up the bits of bread put there for them.

Timidly I crossed this reception-room, and knocked on the door, behind which I heard Ferra speaking.

"Mamma! somebody knocks," cried Kurt's voice, and directly an unskillful baby hand with difficulty opened the door.

"Dare I come in?" I asked.

I expected to see Ferra sitting in the sofa-corner, weeping for very anxiety over her sick mother, as I had done not long before. I stood still with amazement. It was a picture for an artist before me; but it did not belong in a house where a human life was wrestling with death.

There, on a sofa that had been drawn up before the fire, lay Ferra. She had on a white cashmere wrapper, and her wonderful golden hair hung down, unconfined and golden, till it touched the green Smyrna rug. She was shading her face with a hand screen; the wide, flowing sleeve had fallen back, and the beautiful arm had the marble whiteness of a statue. There was a roguish expression on the lovely face, and evident amusement lay under the long lids as she looked down on the young girl kneeling before her, who stretched her delicate hands entreatingly toward her.

They did not see me, either of them, and Ferra continued:

"Do not worry, Melanie; I can not show it to you yet; better take the proofs from Gieson; see it through, and take my advice——"

"Mamma, Lena is here!" interrupted the little boy, and pulled the blonde hair energetically. Ferra raised up quickly, and looked at me in surprise.

"Why, Lena! what is the matter?" she asked; "has anything happened?"

The young lady also rose up and stood near the sofa, observing me with evident astonishment. She wore a riding-habit that fitted perfectly the slender, graceful figure; a pale face, with regular features, and a pair of almost melancholy brown eyes.

"Nothing, Ferra," I stammered. "Forgive me that I disturbed you; but I was so afraid, alone in the old cloister."

"My dear child," said Ferra, languidly, "it is impossible for you to be quartered here; you must see that yourself. Aunt has kindly sacrificed herself to be with mamma."

"O no, Ferra!" I cried, and threw back my head; "I did not mean that. I thought you would be anxious about your mother, and I could help you to drive away a lonely hour as well as myself; and if I am here, I can ask often how she is."

"My cousin, Magdalena von Demphoff," informed Ferra, to the questioning glance of the young woman; "Fräulein von Stelten."

"My dear Ferra," said the latter, "what an absurd creature you are! You made me come on the gallop, a mile and a half, here, in this storm, and yet you have the nicest company one could wish—quite the type of Allenberg's *Gypsy Maiden* that made such a *furor* in the exhibition."

Ferra shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"If you are going to stay, Lena, at least close the door through which you just entered."

"Of course she will stay!" decided Melanie von Stelten. "Now you have come, little Fräulein von Demphoff, I must go in a moment; and you need not be alone, Ferra."

"Will you really not stay, Melanie?"

"Surely not; I did not tell anyone at home where I was going. Hark!" She nodded her head toward the window. "There comes Jean with the horses."

She picked up a jaunty felt hat, pressed it coquettishly on the brown braids, and drew on a fur-trimmed velvet jacket.

"Good-bye, Ferra Mia," she said, and threw her arms around the neck of the young woman in the white cashmere *négligé*. "As soon as I can, I will come again to inquire after your mother. I hope from my heart that she will soon be better. Does your brother know of the illness? Is he coming?"

"Yes," said Ferra, returning the kiss of the fresh lips that lightly touched her forehead. "Would you believe it! I had the dispatch all ready when the doctor literally tore it out of my hands; now I wash my hands—Gerhardt will be angry."

"Do not worry," replied Melanie; "the old doctor can judge whether and when Gerhardt's presence is necessary; he will think of him and of Charlotte."

They had reached the door with these words, and Melanie von Stelten bent down to Kurt.

"Adieu, little one," she said, and stroked the fair hair of the child. In the open door she stopped and turned around. "Adieu, Fräulein von Demphoff;" it had a friendly ring. "I hope I shall have the pleasure of

seeing you often here, and if you take a drive over to Nissen, do not pass us by."

Before I could thank her, the door had closed behind both the slender figures; then the little one hurried after them, and I stood alone in Ferra's *salon.* Over all, deep, dark-green; the soft-green giant fern-leaf pattern woven through the carpet that covered the entire floor; fancy tables of delicate workmanship standing about; stuffed easy-chairs; there a comfortable divan for two, among a group of Southern palms; near by, a writing-desk with a thousand pretty trifles; and above, a life-size photograph of a stately officer in a handsome frame. In the opposite corner, but standing on an easel of dark wood, was Joachim's portrait.

I went up to it and gazed at the handsome face; but, as I observed him closely, I saw again the dissolute, vain expression of the black eyes, and I shook my head in gentle condemnation.

"Well?" questioned Ferra's voice behind me.

I turned around.

"I am going directly," I said. "I was only waiting for Fräulein von Stelten to go."

"Heavens! what is your hurry? Drink tea with me; I ordered it at 8 o'clock. I am naturally tired from the journey. Apropos, how are you pleased with Melanie von Stelten?"

She spoke lightly, leading her boy by the hand to the adjoining room, which door she opened.

"Mademoiselle!" she called, in her ringing voice; "Kurt is tired; put him to bed."

And, kissing the child indifferently, she came back.

"Isn't she lovely?" she volunteered.

"Yes, I find her charming; so natural and so kindly."

Ferra nodded. "Truly," she said, carelessly. "She

is the only one that I would willingly have for a sister-in-law, if there must be a sister-in-law."

Had I heard aright? My hand went suddenly to my heart; it was as if a sharp-pointed iron had entered there. I had never learned how to feign, and the two great eyes that were keenly scrutinizing me from under the long lids could not fail to see that I was seized as with a vertigo, as I looked into the yawning gulf that had so suddenly opened at my feet.

"You seem quite upset, Lena. But you know the unexpected often happens, and Italy matured the fruit that never would have ripened here. Melanie was six weeks in Venice and Rome with her aunt, and she spent almost every day with Gerhardt and Lottchen. Has not Charlotte written you about it? No? That is best, after all; one must not speak much of such things."

As from a far distance these words rang in my ear, and such a deadly stillness had taken possession of me that I almost shrank from the sound of my own voice.

"I am very glad that Gerhardt—a sweet, lovely woman——" The last words would not pass my lips. I set my teeth together as with extreme bodily pain, and was silent.

"And she has nearly half a million; and that is the principal thing, my child."

"No, Ferra!" I found my voice now; "not for Gerhardt, surely!"

She laughed merrily.

"You silly one! do you believe Gerhardt would be so foolish, in his condition, as to burden himself with a poor wife? Think once, how many there are in Wendhusen to be fed and clothed. There is mamma, whose private income has been all used up through Joachim's extravagance; here am I, whose capital has long since passed

out of existence, except some bonds that I can not realize upon. Faugh!" she said, shaking herself, "there is Kurt and Aunt Edith, and beside a host of poor relations that hang on Gerhardt like chains. What could he do? His pecuniary burden would not permit him to remain unmarried *enfin.* He sought a rich wife; God be thanked that it is at least Melanie."

"He does not love her, Ferra!" I stammered.

"Child! love? Naturally he loves her; anyone would show great ardor when suing for a beautiful, rich girl, and I said Gerhardt's wife must be rich. Did you think, child" (she took a letter from the table and handed it over to me), "that the deepest well would not finally be empty if one drew out of it in this manner?"

I threw an unsteady glance on the paper; then my eyes were glued fast to one place. It was a letter from my guardian to Gerhardt, containing the request that he would pay 150 thalers that my mother borrowed, during the last days of her life, of her landlord, as the man needed the money badly.

"Ferra, will you excuse me if I go?" I said, with difficulty, and turned to the door. The room and everything in it were dancing in whirling circles before my eyes. Staggering, I walked over the soft carpet, and out into the cold evening air, through the dark park. Above me roared the storm, and the branches shook over my head; the wind tore from me the shawl that I had wrapped myself in, but I heeded it not. To this day I do not know how I reached my room and felt for my bed in the darkness. There I lay in the deep stillness; I felt more wretched, more forsaken, than ever before in my life.

The first clear feeling was a burning shame for the foolish dream I had indulged in. How had it been

possible for me to take Cousin Gerhardt's sympathy for something else? The beautiful woman in the riding-habit rose before my eyes, and at the same time the small, dark, childish-looking girl. O, how ashamed I felt! He must have read in every line of my letter that I thought only of him!

That was the reason he did not write as he promised; he had no time to give to another. Only now, now that she was in Germany again, had he a longing for Wendhusen.

And then I saw his eyes, heard his soft voice. And he had charged Aunt Edith so earnestly to watch over and care for me! But it was only sympathy for the waif who had fallen to his guardianship. He was so kind, as Ferra said. And if he did not love her? If he was to marry her because she was a rich woman—horrible! And George and I, we were helping on such a deed, because of the additional expense we were to him. And then mamma's debt! O, I could see how it had all come. There was such a long time she could not work; the winter was at hand, coal and wood to be bought. Yes, yes, how could she help it? O, mother, mother! better that we had frozen, than for Ferra to have that letter in her hand to-day—she who never knew what it was to go to bed cold and hungry! And how often had my poor mother done this! If she had known that an inmate of Wendhusen would have to pay her indebtedness, she would rather have died on the spot than to have incurred the obligation. I sat up in bed. "No," I said, half aloud, "I can not bear it—rather entire strangers. I can support myself. Mademoiselle, with Ferra, is no stronger than I—she has a situation. I must leave here; to stay is like death. Good as Gerhardt is, I will not have his pity; I do not need it."

Shaking with nervousness, I got up, and with trembling hands I lighted my lamp and went into Aunt Edith's room, opened the newspaper and sought the advertisements. A proud defiance had taken possession of me. Dry-eyed I glanced down the columns. There were mostly women seeking places:

"A single, well-educated lady desired a situation as agent." "A Christian young woman wished to devote herself to the care of an invalid." "An old, experienced girl, as housekeeper." And so on.

What a host of such that must earn their daily bread! As I was about laying down the paper, my eyes fell on the very last notice in the column: "Wanted, by April 1st, a young girl, as governess to two children, five and six years of age; must be mistress of the French language, and have sufficient knowledge of music to be able to instruct in the first rudiments," *et cætera.*

By April 1st! that suited me. Without stopping to think, I brought pen and ink, and wrote. The writing was bad, and in my excitement I often duplicated my words and had to cross them out, so it was not a letter *comme il faut* that lay before me; but, in spite of its defects, I sealed and directed it, and hid it in my commode. The rain was pouring down in a flood outside, and made going to the post impossible, and Jette must not see the letter.

In a bitter, defiant temper, I went to bed. Humiliated to the core of my heart, sleepless, with aching head, I lay upon the old, canopied bed and stared out into the darkness. Stormily beat the blood in my veins, and my hands were fast locked one in the other. I thought over my first coming—how, the first time I lay in this bed, and how often since a dear, old face had bent down to me and given me my good-night kiss.

Everything passed before my mental vision—Charlotte's sweet friendliness, and his goodness; the dear, lonely cloister garden—and now the time was not far distant when I should desert it all!

O, I knew Aunt Edith would be sorry when I was gone, and Charlotte would weep, and Gerhardt—I seemed to hear his voice: "You are a foolish little woman, Lena—you must not go." Then my heart would cry out: "I will not have your pity, when I believed I had something different; I can not stay here, because I believed you loved me, Gerhardt! I can not see you near her—near Melanie—who is a thousand times better and worthier than I. I should die if you demanded it." But my mouth must be silent, and I would go out of this house, an obstinate, defiant, ungrateful creature, not worthy that a hand should be stretched out to detain me. Yes, it was best that I went before he returned—before I saw Charlotte again.

O, now I understood it all! Aunt Edith, and Charlotte, and over there that sick, fever-tossed woman—they all had to suffer in their love. Now I understood the long years of bitterness of Gerhardt's mother, and comprehended how it was that she could not see the woman who was loved by the man she adored. Was not Charlotte, in comparison to me, a thousand times to be envied?

Toward morning I fell asleep, and was awakened by a noise in Aunt's sleeping-room. At first a heavy weight lay upon me. I could not think what it was; then came, with one blow, remembrance, and with it came back all the bitterness.

I sat up in bed and pushed back the hair from my forehead, as Aunt Edith's pale face appeared in the door-way.

"Now, Lena, I must scold you to-day," she said, ear-

nestly; "you did not feed the cats; the beasts literally fell upon me. Where were your thoughts, child?"

She came toward the bed as she spoke, and looked at me.

"Are you ill?" she said, anxiously, and seized my hot hands.

I shook my head; "O no, quite well, Auntie dear;" but I felt a leaden weight in my limbs, and no desire to move.

"Things are very bad, yonder, Magdalena," said Aunt Edith, observing me anxiously meanwhile. "I came over to put on a more comfortable dress. I have not been able to get any rest all night. She has talked and screamed for hours at a time. Tina and Sister Agnes could hardly hold her in bed; she was determined to go to Robert."

Aunt Edith brushed two great drops from her eyes.

"Now, pray heaven that you may not be ill, my darling. Ah, God! if only her strength will hold out till Gerhardt comes! The dispatch left at dawn this morning."

"The dispatch! Gerhardt coming?" I cried, and, as if electrified, I sprang out of bed.

"Lena! Lena! you are ill?" asserted Aunt Edith, and helped my trembling hands to put on my dress.

"No, no, Aunt; when can he be here?"

"Day after to-morrow evening, child."

"Day after to-morrow evening!"

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"I am quite well, Auntie," I said, reassuringly, to the old lady; "rely upon that, and do not be anxious. Go over, and I will come to and fro, and ask how matters are."

She went. Meditating, I sat in my room. Minka

came over to me and looked at me, mewing, and rubbed herself against my dress. She felt no resentment because I had let her go hungry. Two poor women came for their weekly allowance. With a half side glance, one said:

"She be grievin' hersel' for the Frau that be nearer dead than alive. Yesterday there be a warnin'—the glass fell from the nail."

And the other nodded her head confirmingly. Everything on that day remains in my remembrance, even that little scene.

At noon I went over to the villa, but in a roundabout way, by way of the town. A moment I lingered at the letter-box; the letter deciding my fate glided in. I had not given my address, but that of Christiana. When the answer came, I would no longer be here.

As I stepped through the avenue that led directly to the villa, I saw, on the gravel plat, two horses being led around—on one a lady's saddle—and the groom that walked between the beasts threw, now and then, shy glances to the windows of the upper story. I felt a clutch at my heart. Surely, Melanie von Stelten was here to inquire after Gerhardt's mother—her Gerhardt; and then, in another moment, I saw her with Ferra, arm in arm, going slowly around the grass plat. Ferra's head was lowered, and Melanie appeared to be talking confidentially with her. The green veil of her little hat fluttered wantonly about the fine face, which to-day had the coloring of the apple-blossom.

"Do not lose courage, dearest Ferra; the dear God can yet help," she said, her clear voice reaching me distinctly, "even to the last moment."

I followed the path on the other side of the circle, and reached the house without their observing me.

At my question, "How is she?" they said, "Worse —very critical!"

What could I do? I turned, and went out of the opposite door. Here stood, in summer, the orangery around the small marble basin before the entrance. Charlotte's window overlooked the spot, and from there the eye could rove far over the trees of the park, away to the mountains, beyond which lay Fölkerode. I remained standing. What would come of it all to those two? How could they weather life with that everlasting longing in their hearts? But they knew, at least, they had each other's love; they had read it in each other's eyes; their lips had spoken it—and I?

"So deep in thought, Fräulein von Demphoff?" asked a clear voice.

I started; there she stood, the charming face looking so kindly at me.

"Did you know an answer had come from your cousin? He expects to be here to-morrow evening; it will be making very quick time. Ferra has just carried the dispatch up to Frau Berka. Thank heaven, he is coming, for Ferra would surely have lost her head if the worst had happened."

She looked sad as she spoke these words, and her eyes were moist.

"I have a great respect for that poor, sick woman up there," she continued, "so strong and severe, holding herself so aloof from those who would approach her, and yet her native goodness of heart discernible through it all. She has the same pure-gold, honorable character as Gerhardt Demphoff."

"Yes, Gerhardt is very good," I said, lightly.

"Only good?" she returned, laughing; "more than that, Fräulein von Demphoff—a thousand times more. I

have known him ever since I can remember. He is a man with few equals, honest, faithful—a true nobleman, as he should be; at the same time, with a tenderness, a gentleness—if you had seen his care of Charlotte in Italy!"

"O, I know it, Fräulein von Stelten," I interrupted; "no one has more reason to extol his goodness than my brother and I."

The young lady looked down at me with a peculiar expression in her eyes. I had spoken the words in a tone new to her. She did not reply, but occupied herself with pushing a little stone about on the granite steps with her riding-whip.

"Are you not glad that Charlotte is coming back again?" she asked, finally.

"Yes, indeed, if only the occasion were less sad. I feel so sorry for her. In what anxiety she is traveling now!"

"There is a dark shadow over Wendhusen," said Melanie von Stelten; "for years there has been no pleasure there. O, I have shared it all! First, the death of the old gentleman; then, Gerhardt's long, long illness; Ferra's unhappy marriage with Riedingen, and his sudden death; the terrible misfortune of Joachim—" (great tears stood in the sweet, brown eyes), "and to-day or to-morrow the mother may die."

She sat down on one of the broad blocks which formed the support of the railing of the steps, and held, in summer, the tubs of orange and pomegranate trees.

"She loves him!" kept ringing in my heart, and I walked past her down the steps. There was such keen sorrow in my breast, I longed to be alone. At the bend of the path I turned around. She still sat there, and was following me with her gaze. She looked indescrib-

ably charming, with the graceful poise of the fine head. That I was unhappy, was no fault of hers.

"For shame, Lena! how hateful you are!" I scolded myself, and went back to her.

"Forgive me, Fräulein von Stelten; I was rude, and forgot to say adieu."

She seized my offered hand, and held it close in her own.

"Adieu, Fräulein Magdalena! It is only natural that one in such hours should have no thought for every-day things. I must also go home. I will come again this evening, I live so near."

I walked away, not to the cloister, but far into the park. It was a spring day, so warm and golden, so cloudless and blue, that one could think all the buds of the trees must burst forth at one time, and spread themselves as a green veil over the woods. High above in the blue air flew a bird of prey; ever higher and higher he drew his circle, till at last he swam as a mere speck in the ether.

"There flew a wild falcon
High above me away!"

Sounded in my ear—Charlotte's song! How happy she was when she sang it, and yet her happiness had flown away like the falcon; it seemed as if fair fortune would have nothing to do with Wendhusen and the people who dwelt there.

A luminous green shimmer lay over the grass, and under the trees grew all kinds of pretty wild things—leaves of the wood-sorrel, anemones, and the white blooms of the wild snowbells, with their gold-colored tips. How wonderful a spring here must be!

Could George come here if I went away? O, surely; I would write to Gerhardt and ask him; but I must go

away before he returned—to-morrow! I would go to Christiana. I had enough money for my traveling expenses. But how to go the long distance to the railroad station?—Gottlieb?

He brought me here; he would do it, possibly. I could beg him to do so; I must find some excuse—George is ill? God forbid!—I retracted my sinful lie. No, I know not what, but something would suggest itself; only I must go away from here at any price.

CHAPTER XVII.

And again a night was past, and a new day; and deeper sank the black shadow of death over the house in the park. I did not see Aunt Edith when I went over at twilight to inquire.

On the upper step of the stairway sat Ferra, weeping, with her child asleep in her lap.

"O, Lena!" she cried, and caught hold of my dress, "I am so afraid down there in my rooms! I am not superstitious, but to be so alone, and to know mamma is dying! And there hangs Riedingen's picture, and there Joachim's! I implore you, stay with me!" Ferra had a wonderful talent of being able with one word to blot out entirely a bad impression. Mechanically, I allowed myself to be drawn down by her side and listen to her sobs.

And so we sat side by side; she had my hand fast in her own, and the child lay asleep on her lap. The servants went to and fro noiselessly; they were putting Gerhardt's and Charlotte's rooms in order. Finally, Mademoiselle was called, and the little boy handed over to her care; Ferra wanted to take a look into the rooms herself.

"Soon everything will be changed here," she whispered. "I do not think my brother will remain here, in case the dear God should take mamma from us; he will move into the old manor house."

"Even if Gerhardt should marry, Ferra?"

She turned around and looked at me with an almost frightened look.

"O yes; you are right," she replied, as if recollecting herself; "one forgets in such dark days all else but the one great fact;" and, turning to the servant who came out from the sick-room, she asked:

"How is she, Tina?"

"She is just alive, gracious Frau," said the girl, beginning to weep. "She neither hears nor feels anything more. Ah, it is too dreadful!"

Involuntarily, I clasped my hands. "Dear God," I begged, "bring her back to health; let her yet know joy in life. After such hard, sorrowful discipline, give her happiness."

Ferra began walking up and down the corridor, crying and wringing her hands. "O, my God! my God! This excitement will kill me! O, if it were only over!" There was something childish and disagreeable in her noisy grief.

And again another morning's sun shone into the sick-room, and there was no change in the condition of the suffering woman. A dispatch had come from Gerhardt, directing that the carriage be sent to the mid-day train. I went back to the cloister. I had had Aunt Edith called out, and had cried on her neck. She had comforted me in her tender way. She did not know for what cause I was so inconsolable.

Then I saw from my window the carriage return which brought the brother and sister, and both faces scanned our windows as they flew past. I stood behind the curtains, and as the carriage vanished from my sight, I buried my face in my hands, and a wild, hot pain seized me. Could I go from here? Had I the strength? Was it not beyond me, after all? No, I must go! I must not be weak! And with trembling hands I put some things

in the traveling-bag that I once before had packed with such a heavy heart to come here. After the sun had set I called Jette and sent her for Gottlieb. The old man looked at me in surprise as he entered the room.

"What was it you wished, Fräulein?" he asked, sympathetically, as he saw my wet eyes.

I went close up to him and laid my head on his rough cloth coat.

"Gottlieb, you have always been good to me," I began, and again the tears overflowed.

"Yes, little one, I have tried to be so from the first hour when I saw you peering about so timid and helpless at the station; and I said to myself, there and then, that I would have an eye on that little doll. That is true, gracious Fräulein, and so I have always looked after you."

I nodded.

"And, Gottlieb, to-day you must take me away again," I stammered. "I must go to B—. I have received a letter to-day, but no one must know of it, Gottlieb! Remember, this evening at 8 o'clock. You can wait at the corner of the park; you need not drive to the door."

"Thunder and bombshells! Fräulein, that—don't take it amiss—but this is strange!" exclaimed the old man, and bent over to look in my face.

I turned my head away.

"It is nothing wrong, Gottlieb," I protested. "O, do not refuse me, I beg!"

"Well, well!" he grumbled. "What business have I to question? But—'hm—you know, Fräulein, how it went with me once before."

"O, but that was something quite different, dear Gottlieb, truly! My guardian wishes me to come to him," I stuttered.

"Very well, I will not fail you, Fräulein, but—'hm—8 o'clock, at the corner of the park? Great heavens! exactly as it was before!" he muttered, shaking his head as he left the room.

I ran after him into the corridor.

"Gottlieb, do you know how it is over there?" I asked, anxiously.

"Bad, very bad, Fräulein," he answered, in a low voice. "Ah, heavens! how it grieved me to see Fräulein Charlotte! She will not leave the bed; she moans and prays the dear God not to take too much from her."

I went back. It seemed to me my heart would break.

Whence do tears come? and what a magic they exercise!

Around each piece of furniture in the comfortable old room that I saw through a mist of tears was woven a silver sheen; never before had everything seemed so beautiful, so dear, as now. It seemed to me I could not leave it all, as if I were being driven out of Paradise.

I stood before the empty window-place, Aunt Edith's corner, and lovingly touched and said good-bye to the old-fashioned sewing utensils and trifles that her hands had so often used. I poured fresh milk in the saucers of her pets, and gave drink to the flowers—I never should see them again.

Then it dawned upon me, I must write to Aunt Edith, that she should not seek for me in vain. Hesitatingly, I took up my pen. I found it difficult at first to know how to justify my intention. Finally the note was finished, and I pushed it under the pin-cushion; and then I sat and waited for the dark.

With crimson hues sank the sun to rest, filling the room with rosy light. The clock on the chimney-piece struck seven; one more hour under this roof! And on it

ticked, stringing seconds to minutes; unceasingly moved the pointer slowly round the circle.

"I can not go!" I wailed to myself. "You must! You must!" ticked the clock; and Melanie's lovely face rose up before me, her soft eyes looked into mine. "He is so good, so noble!" whispered her lips. No, I would not see him again. I would not be so unhappy as that dying woman over there had been made in her love.

The clock struck eight; it was almost dark. I sprang up and put on my hat and mantle, and, with my traveling-bag in my hand, I hurried out of the room. In the corridor I stopped; Minka had followed me; I picked her up, and pressed my wet eyes in the soft, velvety fur; then I carried her back into the room.

With double haste I flew down the stairs. I met no one on my way. A cool breeze struck my face outside, and with a shiver I drew my wrap about me.

There, in the gloom, I recognized the wagon, and Gottlieb stood waiting, as agreed upon. It was his old, tired horse; it was the same rickety vehicle in which I came, long months ago. I climbed in; slowly moved on the beast, and slowly the old cloister disappeared behind me, and with it everything—everything!

How slowly the wagon rolled on! The wheels creaked and groaned. If we could only get out of the park unseen!

"Gottlieb, drive faster!" I begged, trembling in every limb. I felt as if we were committing a crime.

"But, Fräulein, the poor old rascal has been in the field all day, and is tired."

I bent far out. There blinked to me the lights from the windows in the villa; there a soul was loosing itself from a weak body; there were tears and prayers! In such sorrow they would not miss me—not even Aunt Edith and Charlotte.

And as the windows were lost in the distance behind me, and I looked out into the dark night, a wild, rebellious feeling filled my heart. No, no, I can not go! I stretched my arms out to Gottlieb, but no sound came to my lips.

"Halt!" said a well-known voice near me.

The horse stopped instantly, and a tall, dark figure opened the carriage door.

"Get out, Magdalena," it said, quietly.

A hand clasped mine. Devoid of will, I obeyed the command.

"Turn around, Gottlieb," said Gerhardt, at the same time putting his arm around me and holding me close to him. Motionless, he remained so until the carriage turned, and, much quicker than it came, disappeared around the bend of the road.

And now we stood alone at the entrance to the park. My tears had ceased to flow. I hid my face in my hands—how I felt at that moment I can not describe.

"Magdalena!" came low and sweet in my ear, "was it right of you now, just at this time, to wish to desert me? Could this same mouth give the command for departure that once spoke so sweetly of a love that, in need and death, in pain and joy, would be steadfast?"

"O, Gerhardt, Gerhardt!" I stammered. "I—leave me!—what would—she—Melanie——"

"Magdalena!" he bent down to me; "who has been talking to you?"

I did not answer.

"Child, have you not felt that my whole heart remained with you in Wendhusen?—with you, Magdalena? And yet you have believed that I——"

"No, no!" I cried out, in rapturous joy, and threw my arms around the neck of my lover. "I believe nothing

more, only that I love you—that I must have died had I gone away!"

And around us blew the night wind. It came down from the mountains, and went rollicking through the park, shaking the high, old trees, and murmuring in the budding branches. The air seemed full of a spring melody—a song of gratitude that the hard winter was past, that an unending fullness of joy had come to a suffering human heart. My soul joined in that hymn of praise, now his arm held me so firm and close as if he nevermore would let me go from him.

It was spring in my heart, and many and beautiful were the flowers that bloomed there, and they twined themselves into a single wreath around Gerhardt—around my Gerhardt!

Then, suddenly, with fear, I looked up.

"Your mother, Gerhardt?" I whispered.

"She is asleep, Magdalena," he replied. "This is a red-letter day, to-day. Just at the moment when Gottlieb came to inform me of your plan of flight, she sank into a refreshing sleep, and Sister Agnes sent us all from the room, else I must have let my little brown maiden be carried away—alone into the wide world!"

"God be praised!" I cried, from a full heart; "but it was nevertheless very disloyal of Gottlieb to have——"

"Peace! From to-day no harm shall ever come to the old man; he shall have a position of trust in my new household. But, now, tell me who told you about Melanie von Stelten?"

"Ferra, Gerhardt. She said you were betrothed to her in Italy; because you were so embarrassed financially, you felt compelled to marry her, and——"

"Go on," he said; "the confession must be complete."

"And George and I—she inferred that we were a

great care upon you; and then, the letter from my guardian—O, Gerhardt, believe me, mamma was not frivolous! O, I was full of grief and shame that, on our account, you should——"

"And Ferra told you all that?" he asked, "and also of the letter?"

"O, Gerhardt, I have seen it, and it asked for a hundred and fifty thalers!" I cried, anxiously, and sought to read his face. It seemed to me really as if he were smiling.

"And so you were going away, in order, if possible, to reimburse me for the large sum? And you and George were to go through life independent of me, so I should have one burden the less?"

I nodded. "Yes, Gerhardt; but also because——"

"Well, because?"

"I could not have borne to see you near another."

He did not answer; his lips pressed themselves close on my mouth.

"I was very cautious," he said, then, "for I knew what would happen in case Ferra knew my secret. I only wrote once to my little Magdalena, and yet—speak, had she no presentiment?"

I was silent a moment.

"No, no, Gerhardt; I scarcely knew myself if I were dear to you; and then—she was not here." As I spoke, I remembered his letter. "Anna saw how I received your letter, and that I kissed it."

"Were you so incautious as that?" he asked, playfully. "Now, I know enough; tell me only, you imprudent, credulous little woman how could you believe all that you have been telling me, after the parting I took from you?"

"O, Gerhardt, I did not understand it," I said, hon-

estly; "but I thought, because you were my cousin——" Now he laughed.

"No, sweetheart, I was very far from a cousinly feeling at that moment, I assure you."

"But," I said, suddenly, "I believe that Melanie von Stelten loves you!"

"No, Magdalena," he replied, earnestly, "not as you think; she has the place of a sister with me. Ask her what she confessed to me in Italy. I have talked to her the entire day only of you, and she listened patiently to everything. She would have married Joachim, and he—he, in his extremity, and not till then, offered himself to her, just a short time before his death. She has no parents, Lena, and she came to me for counsel. She had already heard much against Joachim; but in spite of that she would have accepted him if she had felt she could have been a help to him morally. I warned her, and painted to her what the future would be. She had come to me—I could not let her risk her happiness; she knew well that I had her interests at heart. I have known her since she was a little girl, and have always stood ready to help her at any time with counsel and deed. See, that is all."

Yes; now I understood Melanie's enthusiastic praise: "How good and true he was!"

"Gerhardt," I whispered, "you are much too good for me; I am so——"

"Willful," he finished. "Depend upon it, we shall tame that defiant, little heart yet."

"Yes, I will be better, Gerhardt; but now, one thing more: Your mother—will she accept me?"

"So soon as she is well, which God grant may be soon, you shall receive the answer from herself; but, to set your heart at rest, I will tell you what she wrote me in

the last letter before she was taken ill: 'I say yes with my whole heart, Gerhardt; more and more I see how embittered I was. What had the poor child done to me, that I should have been so harsh to her? Bring her to me, Gerhardt—I will make everything right if God spares my life. My only longing in this world is to know my children are happy—happier than Edith and I have been.' "

We walked on, heeding not the light spring rain. I was now eager to see Charlotte again.

"Gerhardt," I asked once more, as we stood before the lighted vestibule of the villa, and I could see quite clearly his dear face in the pale light, "Gerhardt, tell me truly, and is it no dream?"

"No, Magdalena, it is reality," he replied, looking with infinite tenderness into my eyes.

At the foot of the stairs he parted from me, and said:

"Go up to Charlotte, Lena; I will come after you very soon."

Surprised, I turned around; there was a stern look in his face.

"Gerhardt!" I cried, "you are going to Ferra; you are angry with her!"

"Only a few words, Lena; go up, they will be soon said."

"No, no, dear Gerhardt!" I entreated. "She did not mean to do harm. O, do not say angry words to her to-day, Gerhardt, only not to-day."

"I never was in a milder temper, Lena, than in this hour, and therefore do not hinder me," he said, decidedly. "It is best to free the heart while the deed is fresh, and I will not be a severe judge to her, for your sake, Magdalena. I promise you that, but there is much that must be made clear between us."

"Gerhardt, I implore you," I pleaded, "forget what she did!"

But already he had let my hand fall with a light pressure, and I saw him enter Ferra's room.

A moment I lingered, listening with half fear; then I hurried up the stairs and knocked on Charlotte's door.

"Come in!" called a dear, beloved voice, and the next moment we were in each other's arms. It was dark in the familiar room; I could not see her face distinctly, but I stroked, with loving touch, her soft cheeks and fluffy hair.

"Dear Charlotte—Lottchen—is it surely yourself?"

"Yes, my Lena, the very same—your old Charlotte; and you?"

I hid my face on her breast; no, I was no more the same. The whole blessed weight of happiness pressed to my lips, and yet I was silent. How could I tell her of a joy that she had lost! I only pressed her closer to me. Then I felt a kiss on my forehead. She freed herself from my arms, and in the next moment she stood on the little balcony.

"Charlotte!" I called, softly, hastening after her; but she did not hear. In the pale starlight of the spring night I saw her face, pale and intense, directed to the distant mountains, her hands close folded over her breast. The breeze blew the light scarf from her head; she did not notice it; but it carried a greeting into the far distance.

"Robert! Robert!" I heard her murmur. I would not disturb her, and so we stood a long, long time. There sounded suddenly loud talking from the corridor below; anxiously I went back into the room and listened. Someone pressed on the latch of the door, and it opened a little.

"My betrothed is with Charlotte," I heard Gerhardt's voice. How naturally he said it, as if I had been his betrothed for a very long time.

I pressed my hands to my temples—then it really was no dream?

Then the door opened; the bright lamplight streamed in—and Ferra stood before me. The door remained open, and Gerhardt walked quickly to me, and said, putting his arm around me:

"Ferra has come to welcome you as sister, Magdalena."

I looked at her, and a deep pity took possession of me, for the lips that forced themselves with difficulty to smile were pale as death, and the hands that were stretched toward me trembled. She did not speak as I laid my hands in hers for a moment, but the beautiful head held itself as proudly as ever.

"Ferra intends to desert Wendhusen for a long time," said Gerhardt, as simply and naturally as if there had been only the most friendly relations between them. "It has long been an ardent desire of hers to see Italy, and so soon as mamma is entirely out of danger, she will set out on the journey."

"I think in the coming week," came low from her lips. "Will you excuse me, Gerhardt, if I go back? I have a headache, and——"

He reached his hand to her, but she turned around abruptly, and the next moment the door closed behind her and darkness reigned again in the room.

"O, Gerhardt," I cried, "how sorry I am for her!"

"She is much to be pitied, Magdalena, for she will nowhere find peace, not even in the world where she so longs to be; but I hope when she comes back that—that she will have learned to understand the love she now disdains. But where is Lottchen?"

"Here," answered a soft voice near us. "I will light the lamp to see the little betrothed, Gerhardt." And as the beams fell on her sweet face there played a smile around the sensitive mouth.

"O no, no, brother," she whispered, as he drew her hastily to him and looked lovingly into the tearful eyes; "no, no, I am not envious. God bless you and your happiness!"

As the night came on, the storm outside ceased, the heavens looked down, studded with stars; and deep peace lay over Wendhusen. Aunt Edith sat on her sofa in the sitting-room of the old cloister. She could now leave the sick-room, for the crisis was past, and the invalid had fallen into a deep, health-giving sleep.

Aunt Edith held my note of farewell in her hand, and her shining eyes rested on Gerhardt and me, as we stood together before her

"O, dearest, truest Auntie," I cried, kneeling down before her, "can you realize that I am Gerhardt's betrothed? Are you not surprised?"

"Bless the foolish child! Did I not long ago see that he was over head and ears in love with my little gypsy girl?"

Gerhardt did not reply to her; he had gone to the fireplace and thrown a paper in the flames. I recognized the peculiar form of the letters; it was the paper Gottlieb had found in Joachim's room a few days before.

"There!" he said, "that will never more remind us that there are people who think I have no claim in all the world on happiness."

"We will soon be alone again, Minka," said Aunt Edith, lightly, and stroked the white fur of her favorite, who had leaped on the arm of the sofa. "There, look at her, that faithless maiden, how she beams with happi-

ness! All the tenderness that formerly we both used to have, Minka, she squanders now on him; but we have known for a long time—haven't we?—that we should not be able to keep her."

"You, dearest!" I whispered, with emotion, kissing the wrinkled hands of the old lady. "How can I ever repay you for your love and goodness?"

"Stop! no more tears to-day, Lena," cried Gerhardt; "have you thought of George?"

I sprang up with a little cry of exultation. George, George! now he had a protector, a father's house, a home! I never would weep again, and the tears came faster than ever. "Do let me, Gerhardt; they are tears of joy."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Four years have passed since that evening—years of untroubled, unalloyed happiness. The sun shines finally on Wendhusen, full and complete—a real sun of blessedness—and its rays reflect back from the earnest, true face of my husband, and out of the sweet, laughing children's eyes—our children. O, if my mother had lived, my joy would have been supreme.

We live in the old Abbess House. It is the dearest home on earth. My eldest—that little, fair-haired creature with the dark eyes—trips quite independently along the corridor and knocks with her rosy knuckles on Aunt Edith's door, and she is always received with delight. Every afternoon, however, I send her over to the villa to grandmamma; or the still erect, commanding woman comes herself up the broad steps, straight to the nursery, to bring her grandchild herself. And the little one clings to the good grandmamma with all the tender love of a child's heart.

The boy in the cradle, who has his father's blue eyes and the naughty willfulness of his mother (he can scream lustily if his wishes are not heeded), is, however, the particular favorite of the old lady. She sits hours long by the cradle, and never tires kissing the little, round, dimpled face.

I have a very loving mother-in-law, and the moment when I knelt by her bed and she welcomed me as Gerhardt's betrothed, is one of the most important of my life.

She never spoke of my mother, and, though it was a sorrow to me, I did not dare question.

However, when Gerhardt and I, accompanied by her, went to my father's native town to arrange about the dowry, she wanted to give everything to the little bride with the empty hands. With my heart overflowing with gratitude, I threw my arms about her neck, and then she said, shyly and hastily:

"Come, Lena, take me to the churchyard—to her grave." And she sat a long time by the cypress-grown mound, and bitter tears fell there.

And when we finally went away, she took my hand and said:

" I thank God I have still time, Lena, to do the good to you that I failed to do for her."

A greater concession I could not wish.

The library is Gerhardt's study, as it was his father's before him, and, opening out of it, the large room with the balcony that looks out upon the cloister garden is my room.

My sewing-table stands by the window, and for me there is no lovelier view in the world. The garden is the play-ground of my children; they live there, and little Theresa plays with delight on the old grave-stone. There it glistens through the foliage, my much-loved place. The evening of our wedding-day, Gerhardt led me out on the balcony, and there, in the bluish moonlight, he whispered that it was there for the first time that the little cousin seemed particularly charming to him, with the crimson wreath on her head; and that often, very often afterward, he would stand behind the *jalousies* and look down on me where I sat, so unconscious of an observer.

Gottlieb drove us to the church; and it was a proud

day for him when he guided the four bay horses from the high seat of the bride's carriage. He was also the first one to address me as "Gracious Frau," even before our old Christiana, who had not been deterred by the long journey from coming to me on my bridal-day. As the old man brought a wedding gift in the name of the servants, he said, in his simple-hearted way:

"Gracious Frau, I helped a little bit to this—you know—when you would go away that time."

Now he drives me out almost daily—me and the children. He is my especial coachman, by Gerhardt's command; and if at any time he is out of sorts, he quite tyrannizes over me, and says, though very respectfully:

"It looks like rain; we had better stay at home, my lady; the children might take cold."

And I nod and look up at the sky, and even if my eyes do not discover any clouds, I say: "You are right, Gottlieb; we will remain at home in the cloister garden."

Only one dark shadow moves in this summer brightness—Ferra. She has had the misfortune to lose her little son, and through that has vanished her last support. She is a poor, complaining, restless creature. A few years ago she married again; the bridegroom was the old man from S— that she once assigned to Lotta. She lives in Paris, Baden-Baden, or Italy, as the mood takes her. She could not exist, she thought, on the allowance Gerhardt generously provided for her, when she had believed herself to be mistress of Wendhusen; so she accepted the hand of the aged man.

She left Wendhusen very soon. When Gerhardt led me to his mother, she had already left the villa. She separated from him in anger, and has not forgiven him to-day. He not only should not have married at all, but he married a penniless girl!

Later, Aunt Edith told me that Ferra had endeavored to hold Wendhusen for her son; and so at any price would have prevented Gerhardt from marrying—

However, a short time ago I received a letter from her; she called me her "Little Magdalena," and begged for quite a large sum, "because she was in momentary embarrassment." Gerhardt gave me the money to send to her.

"See," he said, "so begins misfortune. She has secrets from her husband. Write to her, Lena, and place before her that happiness only thrives where confidence dwells."

But she never answered me. Pray God that sometime sunshine may fall on this dark page!

"And Charlotte?" asks the reader.

O, I will not forget Charlotte; she is really the heroine of this narrative—my dear, beautiful Charlotte.

Three days ago I went with my husband to Fölkerode on a glorious summer day. We were the last to arrive; mamma and Aunt Edith had driven over early in the day with the bride. Charlotte would be married at Fölkerode; I could not be separated too long from the children. It was the first time I had left the little lad in the cradle. Of course, I had to make a wedding toilet.

"You must wear a white dress," said my husband, and plucked for me, with his own hand, in the cloister garden, the crimson blooms of his favorite flower to place in my hair. He was very enthusiastic over his little wife's appearance in the lace-trimmed dress of India mull, quite as much to-day as on our wedding-day, when I first wore it.

We found the whole house at Fölkerode trimmed with oak garlands; and when we entered the room the marriage was solemnized. There were only the members of the family present, who stood around the bridal pair,

before the altar made of evergreens. It was a serious wedding, much more solemn than usual when two bind themselves together for life.

Gerhardt held my hand close in his own during the ceremony; I saw how moist his eyes were. In the background showed Gottlieb's silvery-white head.

The window of the large room stood open, and the sweet breath from the forest filled the room. The beautiful bride was pale; but when the minister asked if she would stand by his side in joy and sorrow, in sickness and health, till death should them part, and the "Yes" came clearly from her lips, the tall man by her side threw his arm, with visible emotion, around her; and so they knelt down before the altar for the blessing, and the old man laid his hands in holy benediction on their heads. Charlotte von Demphoff had become Berka's wife, after a long inward struggle.

No, it was no joyful wedding; it could not be. But there never was a marriage where there was more holy consecration, and purer resolves, than that in the lonely, out-of-the-world forest house.

In that slender girl, with the modestly drooped head, was the embodiment of love — the mighty, all-conquering love; the paleness, which sprung from deep agitation, did not leave the sweet face; and Robert's eyes followed her with anxiety, as if he feared still that she might be torn from him; and when she turned to him, there lay an expression of thankfulness on his features which brought the tears to my eyes from sympathy.

In the rosy twilight we started on our journey home. A loving kiss from Charlotte, a hand-pressure from Robert, and Gerhardt lifted me into our carriage.

The young wife stood on the steps, under the shadow

of the tall oaks whose tops were still bathed in the sunlight. Farewells were kissed; she threw her arms around her mother's neck, bent down to Aunt Edith, and we were off. Yet once again, two old women's faces peered out of the carriage window for one more look, and the horses started. "Adieu, Charlotte; adieu, Robert," called Gerhardt and I, and Gottlieb followed the other carriage.

I kept my head turned back just as long as I could see them; they stood, in a close embrace, on the steps, and looked after us. Again a last greeting, a nod, and the solitary forest house vanished behind us in the distant beech woods. Gerhardt held my hand, and silently we drove in the darkening night. While the after-glow of the sunset was still in the sky, the moon was rising in the east, and flooded the world with her silvery sheen, and finally appeared through the dark foliage that high-pointed gable roof under which my children were slumbering—Wendhusen, my home, my happiness!

And now I will close.

In the next room I hear Aunt Edith's soft voice. She is telling my mother-in-law of a note she has just received from Robert.

"They are so happy, Theresa," she says.

It is a joy to see both old ladies together. Tenderer could no sisters be than they in their intercourse with one another.

Have I spoken of all, now? Ah, no; George, my slender, pretty brother, Gerhardt's favorite, who is not crowded out of his heart even by his own children. He is with us now for his vacation. There he comes over the grass plat in the cloister garden. He is taller than I now, and has become an industrious, talented student. When he has passed his examination, he is going to

Fölkerode as forester-scholar, but at the present moment he is carrying his niece—he is quite proud of being uncle. How awkwardly he holds the little midget on his arm! but she laughs and tousles his dark, curly hair. She has now compensation for Auntie Lotta, whom she has missed very much.

And here comes a guest purring around the writing-desk, and reminds me not to forget Minka, the dearest play-fellow of my children. Does she not belong also to Cloister Wendhusen?

THE END.